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The Guardian

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Cottrell transferred $2m to mother days before her Reform donations

Exclusive
Anna Isaac

The convicted fraudster George Cottrell transferred a total of more than $2m to his mother, Fiona Cottrell, in the days before her 2024 donations to Reform UK, the Guardian understands.

Financial industry sources told the Guardian that Fiona Cottrell received one deposit of $1.4m (£1m) and two tranches of more than $300,000 each - money she attributed to having come from her son, George, when bankers asked about the deposits.

On each occasion, the Guardian understands transfers were made 24-72 hours before Fiona made a donation either directly to Reform, or via Britain Means Business, a fundraising vehicle for the political party.

According to sources, the lump sums went through US-based cryptocurrency exchanges before entering Fiona Cottrell's account. These platforms allow crypto assets to be changed for hard currency, such as US dollars or sterling. Some were routed to her via money exchange services.

The Metropolitan police are investigating the funding of Reform UK, with a focus on scrutinising whether there were attempts to disguise the ultimate source of donations.

The disclosures will add to questions facing Reform and its leader, Nigel Farage, whose finances have been under the spotlight since the Guardian revealed he received a £5m gift from the crypto billionaire Christopher Harborne.

Fiona Cottrell was one of the most important donors to the party in 2024, making secret and public donations. She gave two lots of £250,000 in May 2024, which were disclosed transparently to the Electoral Commission. It can be revealed that these were preceded by transfers of $318,878 and $328,815 from her son.

As first revealed by the Guardian, she also gave more than £1m to Britain Means Business, a company controlled by the party's deputy leader, Richard Tice, in June 2024. That transfer was not declared officially at the time, and

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▲ *The scorched grass near All Saints' church in Blackheath, London, is typical of much of southern England*

PHOTOGRAPH: JUSTIN TALLIS/GETTY

Drought declared in half of England

Pippa Neill

Half of England is officially in drought, with July set to be the driest on record after winter floods, the Environment Agency has said.

The "flash drought" developed quickly because of unusually low rainfall and high temperatures.

The seven areas in drought are East Anglia, Hertfordshire and the whole of London, Thames Valley, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Devon and Cornwall, the West Midlands, and Wessex (covering Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire and south Gloucestershire).

Helen Wakeham, the director of water at the Environment Agency and chair of the National Drought Group, said: "The hot and dry weather means we are currently using water faster than nature can replenish it.

"A second consecutive summer drought is an exceptionally serious situation and one that will have long-lasting impacts on our environment, wildlife

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Burnham puts Trident at heart of UK renewal

Dan Sabbagh
Defence and security editor

Andy Burnham will place the renewal of Trident at the heart of his vision of a reindustrialised Britain today when he travels to Barrow-in-Furness to announce the next phase of the nuclear submarine replacement programme.

The new prime minister intends to emphasise that defence spending on projects such as the £31bn Dreadnought-class vessels built in the Cumbrian town is a case study of taxpayer investment revitalising communities around the UK.

"Keeping this country safe is the first responsibility of any government - but security is not only about what we build, it is about who builds it, and who benefits from it," Burnham said before his visit.

A new phase of contracts worth £8.4bn, part of the already agreed Dreadnought programme, will help support 18,000 extra jobs in nuclear defence by 2030 and 22,000 additional apprentices by 2035, Downing Street said.

"To every young person across the country, I want

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The fields of Southampton Common offer a visible representation of what the Environment Agency said was an exceptionally serious situation
PHOTOGRAPH: OLLIE THOMPSON/SOLENT NEWS

Drought declared in half of England as summer of heatwaves continues

Continued *from page 1*

and the economy. We want everyone to stay safe and hydrated during the hot weather but every drop we can save is a drop more for nature and agriculture."

The announcement yesterday means England has experienced drought in three of the past five years: 2022, 2025 and 2026.

In July only 7% of the expected rainfall came, falling to 1% across southern England, with no substantial rainfall on the way. Some parts of Devon have not had rain for 50 consecutive days.

The Environment Agency said record winter rainfall had helped to replenish reservoirs and groundwater, but reservoir storage had now fallen to 7.4% below the average for this time of year. Almost half of all reservoirs are classed as below normal levels, with Wimbleball, operated by South West Water, and Blagdon, operated by Bristol Water, both "exceptionally low".

The Environment Agency said water reserves "should be enough for the coming months until the next period of sustained rainfall".

However, Will Lang, the Met Office's chief meteorologist, said there was "little sign of the widespread, sustained rainfall that would be needed to make a significant difference to the areas most affected by the dry weather".

In England, 40% of the population are under a hosepipe ban, with seven water companies – Affinity Water, Anglian Water, Cambridge Water, Southern Water, South East Water, Thames Water and South West Water – all restricting water use.

Recent research by Greenpeace UK found that water companies were wasting five times more water through leaky pipes than even a nationwide hosepipe ban could save.

Paul Tompkins, the deputy president of the National Farmers' Union (NFU), said this drought announcement "should matter to everyone", adding: "Water is a vital ingredient in food production, and without a secure supply, we cannot build resilient farm businesses or strengthen the country's food security."

The lack of rain also means rivers are running dangerously low. In England, 78% of rivers are now classified as below normal or lower and 17% of rivers are "exceptionally low" for this time of year. The low river flows mean migratory fish, such as Atlantic salmon, are unable to move upstream. At Tuckers Pond in Faringdon, Oxfordshire, the Environment Agency used chemical aeration to save fish from dying as algae that had flourished in the hot and dry weather caused a crash in oxygen levels.

As well as a lack of rain, the UK is experiencing its fourth heatwave of the summer. Temperatures were forecast to peak yesterday, with 35C in places. Also yesterday, a new England and UK June daily temperature record of 38C was verified by the Met Office's site assessment team – higher than the previously reported 37.7C.

The Environment Agency also pointed out that water was evaporating from soils and vegetation.

Recent analysis found the record-breaking heatwaves were evaporating water from rivers and lakes – as well as soils and plants. This has been made 80 times more likely by global heating as a result of fossil fuel pollution in western Europe and 40 times more likely in eastern Europe.

This evaporation makes wildfires more likely. A total of 110 wildfires have been burning at England's most protected sites so far this year. Meanwhile France and Spain are battling "apocalyptic" wildfires, with almost 4,000 people evacuated from tourist sites near Bordeaux.

Waters surrounding the UK are also experiencing marine heatwave conditions. Scientists previously warned that high ocean temperatures globally could result in "mass mortality events" for some species.

By 2055, England will need an additional 5bn litres of water a day to meet demand for public water supply. The NFU said there were simple steps the government could take to store more water, including unlocking the investment and planning changes needed to build more reservoirs – none of which have been completed in England since 1992.

European wildfires *Page 16* →

Norwegian, 19, convicted of visiting UK to kill for money

Priya Bharadia

A Norwegian teenager has been found guilty of travelling to England to carry out a killing ordered by a crime gang linked to Iran.

Johannes Kongsnes Natland, 19, from Stavanger, Norway, agreed to shoot an unknown person for €25,000 (£21,500) in March last year. Two days after he arrived in the UK, armed police arrested him in a hotel room in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, seizing two guns and ammunition.

After deliberating for 17 hours and six minutes, a jury at the Old Bailey found him guilty of conspiracy to murder following a retrial.

Natland did not visibly react to the verdict. Mrs Justice Cheema-Grubb remanded him into custody to be sentenced in October.

Natland, who worked part-time in a pizza restaurant, was recruited by the Foxtrot Network, a Swedish organised crime group with links to the Iranian government.

He told jurors he had agreed at first to the murder plot in exchange for money to pay for drugs, thinking it was just a "joke" or "scam".

On realising he was in a "pickle" with the gang, he planned to "shoot himself in the foot" to avoid carrying out the assassination, he said.

Natland's potential victim has not been publicly identified. The Metropolitan police said its counter-terrorism officers had "uncovered a significant amount of evidence … that Natland was fully aware he was being asked to kill someone in the UK".

"I'm going on crazy mission," Natland had texted his girlfriend. "It will be a bit cool to kill someone. If I don't get caught we have to celebrate."

When armed police banged on his hotel room door, Natland emerged smiling, wearing only boxer shorts, and mimed shooting one of the officers with his empty hands.

Officers then found a plastic bag under his hotel bed containing a semi-automatic pistol, a revolver and 19 rounds of ammunition.

At Natland's trial, one of his friends recalled a conversation where the defendant bragged he was "going to get a lot of money and somebody is going to die". Natland told jurors these statements were "bravado" and he was secretly "terrified".

"I wasn't an international assassin," he said. "I thought people had this impression and expected me to be this guy. I knew I wasn't."

But jurors heard Natland lied after his arrest and had tried to persuade his girlfriend not to give evidence in phone calls made from prison.

Prosecuting, Alistair Richardson said: "The reality is the defendant is a troubled but dangerous young man. A young man who agreed to kill in a foreign country for money."

Natland said that he had got into a 'pickle' with the criminal gang

The court heard that Natland began taking drugs aged 13 and spent time in a care home, where he first met a teenage member of the Foxtrot Network and was passed on to a recruiter known as "Generalen".

On 17 March 2025, Natland took a flight from Stavanger to Manchester on a temporary passport. He was stopped by Border Force officials, who bailed him to catch the next direct flight home.

Instead, he took a taxi to Huddersfield, where he picked up £2,000 in cash, two guns and bullets,and a stolen car with fake number plates. He was arrested the following day.

Natland was controlled by an English-speaking boss called "Agent 47" – an apparent reference to the Hitman video game – whose identity and whereabouts remain unknown.

Despite several high-ranking arrests in recent years, the Foxtrot Network is still the dominant gang in Sweden, thought to be responsible for the majority of gang violence in the country including mass shootings and murders. Its leader, Rawa Majid, known as the Kurdish Fox, is believed to be based in Iran.

Harlow Carr in North Yorkshire, where the RHS plans to send more of its plants, including hydrangeas

PHOTOGRAPHS: DANNY LAWSON/PA; ALAMY

Heatwave putting hydrangeas at risk in south of England, warns RHS charity

Helena Horton

With their lush foliage and blooms which turn pink, purple or blue depending on the soil, hydrangeas are a firm favourite in Britain.

The shrubs bloom in summer and have historically thrived in the mild, damp British climate. But hotter summers and heatwaves such as the one hitting parts of England this week are putting the flower at risk in the south of the country, the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) has warned.

RHS gardening advice service data show queries about drought and heat damage affecting hydrangeas have more than tripled since 2023, making them the most frequently reported plant for hot weather problems.

Hydrangeas rose from seventh to first place between 2023 and 2025 and remain the most frequently reported plant suffering from drought and high temperatures in 2026. The RHS has more than 600,000 members, meaning garden trends and worries are easily spotted among queries sent in.

The gardening charity is considering moving its hydrangea collection from its garden in Wisley, Surrey, to its northern gardens in Greater Manchester and North Yorkshire, where conditions are expected to remain more favourable and less hot and dry.

Guy Barter, RHS chief horticulturist, said: “Hot dry summers are not the best for hydrangeas, although it is mainly the *Hydrangea macrophylla* types (mophead and lacecaps) that suffer most, especially in sunnier sites and sandy soils such as we have at Wisley. However, in light shade, north facing slopes or where the soil is a bit moister, they remain a fantastic plant for summer flowers, especially the more resilient *Hydrangea paniculata*.”

At its Manchester garden in Bridgewater, the RHS has conducted a study into how hydrangeas are faring in the UK amid climate breakdown. During this 2021-25 trial, the shrubs faced challenging weather conditions including drought and record heat in 2022, heavy rain in 2024 and more hot weather in 2025. This damaged the plants and affected their performance and how well they bloomed.

The charity plans to send more plants north as they suffer in Surrey, where they used to thrive. This includes its prize collection of rhododendrons, which will go to Harlow Carr in North Yorkshire, and Wisley’s national collections of rhubarb and gooseberries, which will be taken to the Bridgewater garden in Salford.

Some plants are flourishing, with fig and almond trees doing well in RHS gardens. Banana and lotus have also flowered at Harlow Carr, something not thought to have been possible 10 years ago.

Tim Upson, RHS director of gardens, said: “We’ve seen first-hand at our gardens that hydrangeas growing in shadier positions cope far better during prolonged hot dry weather than those exposed to full sun.”

Saunas in hot weather? They could help you to cope, say scientists

Nicola Davis
Science correspondent

Even as summer temperatures soar, the sauna trend is booming, with some venues touting them as a way to beat the heat. But while experts have urged caution about sweating it out in hot weather, a growing number of studies are considering whether heat training could help people prepare for heatwaves.

Nicola Pegues, the head of operations at the London not-for-profit Community Sauna Baths, said bookings had fallen initially as temperatures rose. “But now we’re seeing bookings come back,” she said, adding that all of the sites were outdoors with saunas and cold plunges.

Prof Jari Laukkanen, a cardiologist at the University of Eastern Finland who has carried out research into the health benefits of saunas, said repeated exposure to heat could help the body gradually become better at coping with high temperatures.

“This is well established in sports physiology, where athletes deliberately use repeated heat exposure to improve heat tolerance before competing in hot environments,” he said. “Indeed, quite similar physiological adaptations may also occur with passive heat exposure such as sauna bathing and hot water immersion.”

Laukkanen said heat adaptations included earlier and more efficient sweating, improved skin blood flow, expansion of plasma volume and reduced cardiovascular strain during subsequent heat exposure.

“In other words, regular heat exposure may help the body regulate temperature more efficiently,” he added.

Dr Jessica Mee, a senior lecturer in physiology the University of Worcester, said regular heat exposure also changed how hot people felt and how they behaved. “People who are accustomed to heat pace themselves more sensibly, hydrate more consistently and recognise their own warning signs earlier,” she added.

However, heat acclimation may not benefit everyone equally. Dr Heather Massey, an associate professor in extreme environments and physiology at the University of Portsmouth, said: “The adaptations rely heavily on the body’s ability to increase sweating and skin blood flow.”

There are also safety concerns around saunas and hot baths for people with an acute illness or fever, unstable angina, a recent heart attack, or uncontrolled low blood pressure, with Laukkanen noting they should avoid such exposure until medically assessed or treated.

He added that heat adaptation was not the same as heat protection. “There is currently limited evidence that going to a sauna during a heatwave itself protects people from heat-related illness or other conditions,” he said. “The benefits are more likely related to long-term adaptation through regular heat exposure rather than using a sauna as an acute treatment during very hot weather.”

Mee said: “Heat acclimation is a preparation strategy for the mild months, not a coping strategy for the hottest day of the year.”

She added that one issue on a hot day was that there was no meaningful recovery after using a sauna or hot bath.

“You are stacking one thermal challenge on top of another on a body that in all likelihood is already dealing with several consecutive nights of poor sleep, some degree of dehydration and cumulative cardiovascular strain,” she said. “That is precisely the profile in which heat-related illness develops.”

Laukkanen said he would encourage people to follow public health advice during a heatwave. “Regular heat exposure is not a substitute for staying hydrated, avoiding strenuous activity during the hottest part of the day, and looking after vulnerable people,” he said. “Those remain the most important measures.”

Research into the health benefits of saunas found that repeated exposure to heat could gradually help the body become better at coping with high temperatures

PHOTOGRAPH: RICHARD BALL/GETTY

◀ George Cottrell, left, with Nigel Farage in 2019, is alleged to have transferred $2m to his mother shortly before she made a donation to Reform UK
PHOTOGRAPH: MARK KERRISON/ALAMY

Cottrell transferred $2m to his mother days before her Reform donations

Continued *from page 1*

was routed via the bank account of Oneify, an Australian money exchange service. Half that sum was transferred directly to the party days later by Tice, with no declaration it originated from Fiona Cottrell.

It can now be revealed that sources have told the Guardian that $1,400,000 was deposited into Fiona Cottrell's account by her son before she gave the £1,075,000 to Britain Means Business on 10 June 2024, just weeks before the general election.

In total, George Cottrell deposited $2,047,693 into his mother's account, the Guardian has been told. Taking into account her 2024 donations to Britain Means Business and Reform, Fiona Cottrell gave a total of £1.5m that year. These amounts are roughly equivalent, based on exchange rate data from May and June 2024.

Two Reform UK sources who were involved in party fundraising before the 2024 vote told the Guardian that George had assured senior party figures that some money would be on its way into the party's coffers in the run-up to the vote. "He was acting as a sort of shadow treasurer, saying he would find a way to get more money in," one of the sources said.

Asked about the transfers, lawyers for George Cottrell said their client had no further comment.

In previous legal correspondence, George has not denied giving his mother large sums of money. Instead, he said via lawyers that "any political donations his mother has made have been entirely her own decision, and are a matter for her".

Fiona Cottrell has not responded to several attempts by the Guardian to contact her. George Cottrell lives in Montenegro and has said he is resident there for tax purposes. He has been called Farage's chief of staff by Reform insiders, even though the party says he is only a volunteer.

His lawyers have said he is a permissible donor, despite living abroad, but have not explained how he meets the criteria. The only declared donation George Cottrell made to Reform in 2024 was £15,000 to part-fund Farage's trip to Florida that December, where he met Elon Musk.

It comes as pressure mounts on Reform's leadership to explain the lack of transparency, and apparent overlap, between personal funders and political backers.

The Guardian revealed in recent weeks that Tice had received an undisclosed loan of £80,000 from George Cottrell, who has also donated to Reform UK.

In April, this newspaper also revealed that Farage received an undisclosed gift of £5m from the party's most important donor, Harborne.

Several of these transactions caused bankers to raise potential money-laundering concerns with the UK's National Crime Agency, via suspicious activity reports (SARs), according to financial industry sources. After the Clacton byelection, Farage faces investigations by the parliamentary standards commissioner into whether he should have declared the £5m and also over benefits in kind given by George Cottrell.

In an interview with the Telegraph last week, Farage appeared for the first time to acknowledge that he should have declared the £5m on the register of MPs' interests: "All right, perhaps I should have filled in a piece of paper. If that's the worst thing I've done in life – not filling in a form – I would say that's not too bad."

Tice has failed to engage with questions about his loan from George Cottrell and decision to transfer £500,000 to Reform UK from Britain Means Business despite bankers raising concerns with him about the origin of the funds. He has accused the Metropolitan police of being involved in a smear campaign against him and briefing the media. He posted on X: "The Establishment are playing dirtier than ever to try to smear & discredit Reform leaders."

The Met investigation into Fiona Cottrell's four donations in 2024 has been continuing for more than a year.

The Met issued this statement in recent weeks: "An investigation was launched in February 2025 after a referral was made to the Metropolitan police by the Electoral Commission relating to donations made to a political party ahead of the 2024 UK general election. Detectives from the Met's special inquiry team are investigating alleged offences under section 61 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.

"Early investigative advice has been sought from the Crown Prosecution Service and two people have so far been interviewed under caution. No arrests have been made.

"An offence under this section is not one that the Electoral Commission can investigate and, as such, it is a matter for the police."

Asked whether Reform had been assured that George Cottrell would find a way to provide funds, and was regarded as a shadow treasurer, a spokesperson said: "We deny this completely. Reform takes pride in its stringent vetting of donations and always ensures that the Electoral Commission guidelines on donations, as set out in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, are strictly followed, as has been the case with all donations."

▲ Glenn Gibbins had been reinstated by Reform UK

Social media
Gibbins charged over post

A Reform UK councillor has been charged with posting a grossly offensive message on social media after allegedly making a racist comment about Nigerians.

Glenn Gibbins, 66, of Sunderland city council, has been charged with the offence under the Communications Act 2003, Northumbria police said.

The force said the charge was in relation to a post from 2024 which referenced the Nigerian community. It was alerted to the post in May and launched an investigation. Gibbins is due to appear before South Tyneside magistrates court on 21 August.

A Northumbria police spokesperson said there has been "significant interest" in the case and urged people "not to speculate both online and in the community in relation to this case".

The Labour party chair, Bridget Phillipson, called on Nigel Farage, the Reform UK leader, to explain why Gibbins was reinstated after an internal disciplinary process.
Josh Halliday and Ben Quinn

Hackers steal personal details from DfE and police databases

Dan Milmo
Vikram Dodd

A cyber-attack has targeted the Department for Education and a police database, exposing more than 740,000 pieces of data.

Details of government officials, school leaders, university staff, police officers and members of the public have all been compromised.

According to a website set up by the hackers, more than 600,000 lines of data have been stolen from the DfE's customer help portal, including full names and contact details for staff and parents. A smaller package of similar data has also been taken from the department's Turing portal, which manages a scheme for students studying abroad.

The Police National Legal Database, which provides legal assistance to UK police forces, was also breached, with the hackers claiming to have taken 135,000 pieces of data. The PNLD said the stolen details related to "police officers and those working in criminal justice including their name, the force or organisation they work for and their work email address".

It said the database does not hold confidential victim, witness or offender information, but added that the names and addresses of some members of the public who had used its "Ask the Police" service were among the data taken.

While embarrassing, the breach of the police legal database is not thought to be serious.

A previously unknown hacking gang calling itself ExfilSquad has claimed credit and posted samples of the data online, a typical gambit for cybercriminals seeking a ransom.

The hackers are demanding a payment from the DfE and PNLD in exchange for not posting all the data, according to a message seen by the Guardian. It indicates that the full tranche of data will be uploaded publicly if the DfE, PNLD and other hacking victims do not make an unspecified payment.

"The payment we request of you is simply a rounding error compared to the litigation costs of your data leaking. Be smart and just pay," it read.

The government said it was working closely with the National Cyber Security Centre and the National Crime Agency on the DfE hack. The DfE and the PNLD have both reported the incident to the Information Commissioner's Office.

A DfE spokesperson said "swift action" had been taken to contain the incident. "The information involved is limited to customer service contact details relating to individuals and organisations," they said. "No other data has been accessed."

It is understood the customer help portal data includes disparate sets of data that cannot be connected to each other easily.

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Saltburn residents on the cheating scandal
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Glen Hansard
Tributes after Irish singer dies aged 56
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Staff at V&A East Storehouse vote to strike in toilet break row

Nadia Khomami
Arts and culture correspondent

Staff at the V&A’s newest site in east London have voted overwhelmingly to strike in a dispute over what they say are inadequate toilet and hydration breaks.

They will join staff across V&A sites in London who voted yesterday to strike in a wider dispute over pay, working conditions and the museum having declined to seek living wage accreditation.

The trade union Prospect said members at V&A East Storehouse, which opened in May 2025, were denied enough time during the day for toilet breaks or hydration.

The dispute centres on collections access officers who facilitate the “order an object” service, a central part of the site’s offering of public access to the V&A’s vast collection.

The union is calling for two paid breaks a day, saying staff need time to use the toilet and hydrate during what it describes as a punishing schedule. It said a collective grievance had failed to secure an “extremely reasonable request for customary paid breaks”, which workers elsewhere in the organisation receive.

Prospect said many of the staff had been recruited from the local community, which the V&A had highlighted publicly, but they were treated worse than colleagues at other sites.

One Prospect member said: “We get just one unpaid lunch hour, even though we’re on our feet for long hours, interacting with the public and doing a lot of manual labour.

“Breaks are a welfare issue. The Storehouse is purpose-built for storing objects, but they haven’t really thought about the human aspect – how far we have to travel around the building or where the bathrooms are.

“We’ve experienced a lot of dehydration, and sometimes people don’t even go to the bathroom for the whole day.”

Another Prospect member said: “Every day we go into work there’s someone who has a headache because they’re dehydrated. Management says we always have time to take breaks and drink water. But we need someone to relieve us because we can’t leave trolleys of collection objects unattended …

“We are the newest department at the V&A. We are the most diverse back-of-house department. It’s not lost on us that we were hired to represent the east London community, but our welfare is being neglected.”

At V&A East Storehouse, 100% of those voting backed strike action on a turnout of nearly 88%, while 92% supported action short of a strike.

As part of the wider dispute, Prospect is seeking a minimum 4% pay rise for staff earning above the living wage, time-and-a-half for bank holiday working, accreditation as a London living wage employer within 12 months, and improved food provision at V&A East sites.

Across the V&A, 83% voted for strike action on an 82% turnout, and 95% voted for action short of a strike. The timing of any industrial action has yet to be decided.

Mike Clancy, Prospect’s general secretary, said: “This incredible new way of showing off our heritage is being delivered by workers who are denied adequate break time to use the toilet or have a drink of water.

“Visitors will be appalled to learn that the kinds of working practices unions campaign against in companies like Amazon also exist in an internationally renowned heritage institution.” He said the dispute reflected “a shocking lack of respect” for staff across the museum.

The V&A was approached for comment. Responding previously to a separate strike ballot by the Public and Commercial Services Union, it said all staff had access to water, toilet facilities and regular breaks, and pointed to additional measures during this summer’s heatwaves, such as extra rest breaks and staff rotations.

He’s behind you Norah Lopez Holden as the Princess and flamenco artist Pablo Egea perform in a flamenco-inspired production of Love’s Labour’s Lost at Shakespeare’s Globe theatre in London. The director, Indiana Lown-Collins, is half Spanish and says she ‘just knew it would sound incredible’ to perform flamenco on the Globe’s oak stage.

PHOTOGRAPH: TRISTRAM KENTON/ THE GUARDIAN

Growth rate of population in England and Wales lowest since pandemic

PA Media

Population growth in England and Wales has slowed to its lowest rate since the Covid-19 pandemic, figures show.

The slowdown is largely due to a fall in net migration to the UK, which has dropped sharply since hitting record levels in 2023. There has also been a slight fall in natural change – the difference between the number of births and deaths.

About one in four local areas experienced a fall in their population in the year to the middle of 2025, according to estimates published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

The population in Wales dropped for the first time in a decade, and the total for London fell slightly as a result of more people moving out of the capital to live elsewhere.

The overall population of England and Wales was an estimated 62 million in mid-2025, up 224,900 (0.4%) from 61.8 million in mid-2024, the ONS said.

This is the lowest rate of increase since mid-2020 and follows a run of much steeper jumps, including 1.4% in 2023 and 1.0% in 2024.

Net international migration to England and Wales, the difference between the number of people immigrating from outside the UK and those moving abroad, was 211,700 in the year to mid-2025, down from 612,500 in the previous 12 months.

There were 588,000 births and 568,400 deaths, meaning natural change contributed an increase to the population of just 19,600. The number of births was the lowest since mid-1978, while deaths were their lowest since mid-2019.

About 709 people in England and Wales were estimated to be aged 105 or over last year, up by 34% from 529 the previous year.

The jump was a result of the large generation born after the first world war starting to reach this age, the ONS said. The first world war ended in 1918 and was followed by a spike in births in 1919 and 1920.

Of the 709 people aged at least 105 in mid-2025, 629 were women and 80 were men.

Nigel Henretty, head of population statistics at the ONS, said: “Migration has been the main driver of population change in England and Wales for the past quarter of a century.

“While that has continued to be the case, the recent fall in migration has led to the smallest population growth since the height of the pandemic.”

Jared Leto faces four allegations of criminal sexual conduct

Nadia Khomami
Arts and culture correspondent

The actor and singer Jared Leto has been accused in a BBC documentary of criminal sexual conduct by four women, with the alleged offences taking place when the women were teenagers.

The incidents are alleged to have taken place between 2002 and 2016, when Leto was in his 30s and 40s. He is now 54.

One of the women alleges the Oscar winner assaulted her in a motel bathroom when she was 17. Another alleges that he threatened her with sexual assault when she was 19 and had been unexpectedly left alone with him in a hotel room.

A third alleges she had sex with Leto in California when she was 17, which would be classified as statutory rape. She claims the actor "shrugged off" a conversation about the age of consent being 18 in the state.

A fourth woman alleges that Leto made repeated sexually explicit phone calls to her when she was 16, and on at least one occasion suggested they should have sex. She was subsequently sent a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) to prevent her from talking about her relationship with Leto, which the BBC said it had seen. The woman refused to sign the NDA.

Despite repeated attempts to contact him, the BBC said Leto had not responded to the allegations.

Jared Leto: Hollywood's Dark Secret was released yesterday. It features a total of 10 women alleging the actor and musician behaved in a sexually inappropriate way towards them, with nine of them sharing their stories publicly for the first time, the BBC said. The broadcaster added it had corroborated "a number of the women's accounts with friends and family who were told about the encounters with Leto at the time".

In some cases, it said it had also seen pictures and messages that "support the women's accounts".

The documentary also features two accounts from individuals who worked with Leto's band, Thirty Seconds to Mars, who say staff felt uncomfortable about his conduct. They allege he would sometimes invite teenage girls backstage to his dressing room or to the house where he was recording.

Leto has been a prominent actor since the 1990s, with Fight Club, The Thin Red Line and Girl, Interrupted among his early major films.

He won an Oscar for his role in Dallas Buyers Club and has also appeared in hit films such as Suicide Squad, Blade Runner 2049 and, most recently, Masters of the Universe.

Thirty Seconds to Mars were formed in 1998 and are known for tracks such as The Kill, Kings and Queens and This Is War. They are to perform in London and Manchester next year as part of a European tour.

Last year, the American DJ Allie Teilz alleged Leto had assaulted her when she was 17. In a separate report in the digital newsletter Air Mail, nine women accused Leto of engaging in inappropriate behaviour. He denied the allegations.

▶ *A new BBC documentary features a total of 10 women who allege Leto, 54, behaved in a sexually inappropriate way towards them*
PHOTOGRAPH: TAYLOR HILL/WIREIMAGE

Rape Crisis offers support on 0808 500 2222 in England and Wales, 0808 801 0302 in Scotland, or 0800 0246 991 in Northern Ireland

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Body in suitcase found in Athens is that of British woman aged 38

Helena Smith
Athens

A body found in a suitcase in an abandoned building in central Athens has been identified as that of a 38-year-old British woman.

Eleven days after the find, sources shed some light on the mystery yesterday after the police appealed to foreign law enforcement agencies.

"The remains, we can confirm, have been identified as belonging to a British woman," one well-placed source said. "Her next of kin have been informed," they said, adding it had been ascertained the victim was born in Scotland in 1988.

Late yesterday, Greek media named the victim as Elizabeth Jane Ross. Several outlets carried pictures of Ross smiling into the camera.

Ross had reportedly flown to Greece from the US, arriving on 29 June via Cyprus. She had been staying with friends in Athens, who reported seeing her for the last time on 15 July, about the time forensic scientists believe she was killed.

The Greek public broadcaster ERT reported that a homeless man discovered the suitcase on 18 July in a derelict building in Kypseli, an area of downtown Athens popular with foreign nationals.

Konstantina Dimoglidou, a police spokesperson, previously said CCTV was being studied in an attempt to trace the woman's movements before her death. She told the broadcaster Skai TV the incident was being treated "as a criminal act, given how the body was found".

Local media, citing the results of a postmortem, said the victim had been dead for eight days before the discovery, and there was "no evidence" of a struggle or signs of injury.

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‘Not gentleman-like’

North Yorkshire seaside calm bowled a googly by mystery of click on willow

▲ *Accusations that a player for Saltburn second XI faked the sound of ball on bat in Saturday’s game with Norton second XI has bemused many in the Victorian resort town, left, including at the over-60s ukulele club, below*

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS: GARY CALTON/ THE GUARDIAN

Mark Brown
North of England correspondent

At the Saltburn over-60s ukulele club there was an obvious reaction to news that the town’s cricket club was being compared to Argentina’s football team: laughter. Then a spirited rendition of I Love to Boogie.

On the seafront, a litter-picking volunteer was looking forward to quiz night just to get the gossip. But she had her own view. “All I would say is it’s just not cricket, is it?”

Bill Peters, a retired steel worker on a day out from Middlesbrough with his wife Janet, reflected on what would have happened in St Lucia where he played cricket growing up. “There would have been a big fight,” he said slowly and purposefully.

Saltburn-by-the-Sea is a lovely Victorian seaside town in north-east England whose usual claim to fame is the cliff lift, the oldest water-balanced funicular still in operation in Great Britain – though it is currently out of operation.

This week the town has become the centre of a cheating story that has made headlines all over the world.

It began after a video was posted online of Saturday’s game between Saltburn second XI and Norton second XI. The video appeared to show a fielder clicking his fingers as the batter swings for the ball. The fielder has been accused of trying to trick the umpire into thinking the ball clipped the edge of the bat before being caught.

The bemused batter can be seen protesting to the umpire as Saltburn players celebrate.

It has been called “clickgate” and the fielder nicknamed “Clicky Ponting”, though his name is Brian. Ponting, an Australian cricket legend, is, it should be stressed, entirely blameless and not a character in the affair beyond his name Ricky rhyming with Clicky.

The clip has been viewed more than 7m times and has been picked up by numerous news outlets including, as would be expected, in Australia. One wit on Facebook remarked: “It’s official, Saltburn are the Argentina of local cricket.”

Neither Saltburn nor Norton have commented on the affair, which is being investigated by the North Yorkshire and South Durham Cricket League.

When the Guardian visited the cricket club no one wanted to talk. Tennis players arriving for games on the adjacent courts just burst out laughing.

In town, Pete Welsh, part of the litter-picking posse, was struggling to get his head round it. “It must have been a very loud click,” said the retired teacher. “If he was doing it and cricket is a gentleman’s game, it wasn’t very gentleman-like. I reckon if the lad has anything about him he will come forward and say yes, it was me.”

Just how someone managed to click his fingers so loud that the umpire heard it is baffling a lot of people. The commentator Jonathan Agnew, told BBC Breakfast: “I can’t wrap my head round it. Can I hear someone click his fingers from 30 yards away? That umpire … must have incredible hearing.

“They call it a gentleman’s game, but it’s not really.”

The story has prompted many jokes – but if you play cricket in the league then it is less of a laughing matter.

In Saltburn’s previous match, against Shildon Railway second XI, the wicketkeeper made an incredible eight catches in his team’s 22-run victory. The men’s Test record for catches by a keeper in an innings is seven.

▲ *For Bill Peters, visiting Saltburn with his wife, Janet, on a day out from Middlesbrough, fighting would have ensued in his native St Lucia*

Shane Rowley was playing for Shildon Railway and is sure he was a victim of clicking. When he was judged out, he said to the umpire: “Come on, please. You know I haven’t hit that one. I was miles away from it. I wish I was somewhere near it!”

He didn’t hear the ball hit his bat – “but everyone else did”, Rowley told the Guardian. Or did they?

After the game and the eight catches behind, Rowley said they raised complaints about poor umpiring. After clickgate footage emerged on social media, Rowley said he rang an umpiring official to apologise. “I said, can I just retract what I said earlier in the week and apologise and please extend apologies to the umpires.”

‘It’s unbelievable. I’ve never seen anything like it and I’ve been playing for 30 years, since I was eight’

Shane Rowley
Local cricketer

Rowley said three players did get a nick on the ball before being caught. The others swore they did not and were “absolutely fuming”. Including him.

“It is unbelievable,” said Rowley. “I’ve never been involved in a game where I’ve seen anything like it and I’ve been playing for 30 years, since I was eight.”

To say other clubs are annoyed might be an understatement. Ian Palmer, chair of Newton Aycliffe Cricket Club, said, if true, it was “scandalous”.

He added: “These are lads giving up all of their Saturday to play a game of cricket and if they are being cheated it is just not on really.”

The “Clicky Ponting” player has been identified as Brian Devine, a 38-year-old company secretary who has lost sponsorship from a local Indian restaurant. Unconfirmed reports suggest he has been suspended by his club. Devine did not respond to an approach for comment.

For Neal Toulson, a former chair of Thornaby Cricket Club and someone involved in the game for more than 50 years, the allegations are a reflection of a wider malaise.

“I think cricket in general has gone down the pan a little bit with regards to gamesmanship,” he said. “When I was a lad – and it’s a while ago now – you never even appealed unless you thought it was genuinely out. Now everybody’s shouting for everything. And then there’s the sledging.”

Sledging, the dark art of trying to put off a batter with insults or teasing, goes on all the time in lower league cricket, Toulson said.

He added: “You’d think they were playing for money. It’s crazy, right? I always took cricket seriously, I competed as hard as I could but at the same time – you play fair.”

Toulson said he hoped there would be a full investigation and if cheating was found then a ban should be the consequence.

“It has come across as a bit of a joke but it’s not. It’s cheating. If the guy is found guilty he should be punished. I’ve seen players banned for swearing to themselves and it is a lot worse than that.”

▼ *Andy Burnham at a residential home in London yesterday, when he talked about social care reform*
PHOTOGRAPH: KIRSTY WIGGLESWORTH/AP

PM says palliative and social care must be fixed before assisted dying is debated

Pippa Crerar
Jessica Elgot

Andy Burnham said the assisted dying debate needed to wait until palliative care and social care were fixed, as he set out his path to resolving one of the most intractable problems in British politics.

The prime minister said he was not opposed to having the debate on assisted dying, but told reporters it would be "very challenging" to introduce the controversial legislation until the care system was in a better place.

The new prime minister's remarks came during a speech yesterday at a care home in north London about social care reform, an issue on which he has repeatedly said he was ready to expend his political capital.

Although as Greater Manchester mayor Burnham said he would probably vote in favour of a private member's bill going through parliament, he said he now thought the priority should be to improve end-of-life support.

His caution may give some Labour MPs pause for thought when the latest version of the bill – which has divided backbenches across the usual party lines – comes before them for a vote in September.

"I take the view that that debate – and I don't say that there shouldn't be a debate at some point about those issues – personally, I think there's something that needs to happen first," Burnham told reporters.

"That is the fixing of the funding of palliative care and social care. I think it is very challenging to introduce that wider debate in a context of people not receiving that care and having the peace of mind about that care."

When Burnham was previously an MP, he abstained from a 2015 vote on another bill to legalise assisted dying because of concerns over safeguards and people feeling under pressure.

But when the issue came up again, in 2024, he said that his family experience in the nine years since – with his father, Roy, in a care home with dementia – had changed his view. "I think we do allow people to suffer and families to suffer too much," he said.

At the time, he caveated his support, saying he would want a requirement, before any new law was implemented, that hospices would be "properly funded and sorted out".

The bill's proponents, including the MP Lauren Edwards, who is the new sponsor of the private member's bill, have said they will press ahead with the vote in September.

> *'It is very challenging to introduce that wider debate in a context of people not having peace of mind about care'*
>
> **Andy Burnham**
> *Prime minister*

Burnham indicated that his plan would probably require tax rises – though making the NHS and care system more integrated and therefore more efficient would help initially – and he repeated his promise to stick to Labour's manifesto on tax for this parliament.

"I think more is possible from within existing resources. And the things that I've talked about today, particularly around the workforce, will be fully funded. I think it is possible from existing budgets to do much more," he said.

"Some of what we would want to [do] in the fullest sense will require difficult decisions … But we will be honest with people about those. We will put them before the country at the right time, and we will hopefully proceed with people's consent."

However, the prime minister said life had "moved on" from when he last tried to achieve social care reform as health secretary under Gordon Brown in 2010 – when options had included a 10% levy on inheritances – suggesting that a "more voluntary approach" may work better now.

Burnham has invited the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats for talks in Downing Street as he attempts to find common ground on the issue, saying he accepted that he may need to make some compromises.

"I think there are ways of looking at this that could include a more voluntary approach initially, or could include a roadmap to a reformed social care system."

Burnham added that "in an ideal world", nobody would have to sell their home to pay for care, and that his 2010 proposals had been designed to address that, because if everybody contributed a little, most of what they had worked for would be protected.

"I think the whole thing is horrendous for those who live through it. Paying for care that often isn't good enough. In an ideal world, no, I wouldn't want to see that."

Burnham said he would never forgive himself if he allowed "screaming headlines" to deter him from trying to reform the system, after 22 failed attempts over the past three decades.

"On this issue, please can we have a factual debate? Can we allow people to weigh up the different options … and then just come to a considered view based on those facts?

"I don't think it should be too much to ask, because I think the public will give us their view. They'll make it really clear what they feel they can accept and what they can't.

He announced that Louise Casey would bring forward her independent review into social care options by a year, to summer 2027, and that the fair pay agreement for care staff would be the start of bringing the sector closer to NHS standards.

Yvette Cooper, the new health secretary, will appoint a dementia adviser this summer.

Case studies 'You have to sit quietly until you die'

Claudia Efemini

Mary's late husband, Richard, was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's disease in 2015 at the age of 55. She had to quit her job as a fashion designer to care for him and paid for 15 hours of care a week, amounting to nearly £27,000 a year. When Richard went into a residential care home in 2024, the couple were forced to sell their house in London to meet care bills of £2,000 a week.

"I'm left with virtually no savings, living on my pension, working a bit and I have very good friends who I rent from,'" says the 67-year-old from Kent. They had worked hard to build a good life, and it was frustrating to give it all up, she says. "I'm a very positive, resilient person but I think I've been through a really ugly tunnel with very little help."

Mary also had to juggle caring for Richard with everyday tasks such as shopping and sorting bills. Though she is grateful for the support she has received from charities such as Alzheimer's Society, she wishes there was more guidance available to help carers manage their finances when a loved one is diagnosed with dementia.

She feels dementia – a terminal neurological disease – is neglected by the system. "If it is not something you can give a drug to, you're swept aside. You have to sit quietly until you die and hope your friends and family look after you."

She now worries about her children's future. "It's giving me sleepless nights. When my children may need care, they won't have any savings."

Mary is happy to pay more tax to help fund social care. "We pay insurance for our cars and no one complains," she says. "Why can't we pay insurance to take care of us when we're older?"

Annabel's 27-year-old son, Fred, lives independently with the support of carers who help with his daily living. His local council, North Somerset, charges him £147.54 a week from his benefits to pay for his care, leaving him with very little to live on. As providers of home care, councils have the power to decide how much to charge for care.

"Fred would be £147 a week better off if he lived in Hammersmith and Fulham, where they don't charge for home care, and £47 better off in Wales, where the cost cap for care at home is £100," says Annabel.

She believes social care needs proper government investment. "Charging people on benefits for their care doesn't seem like a reasonable thing to do," she says.

In the future, Annabel wants to see social care fully funded like the NHS. She is anxious about the future; her mother, who has dementia, had to sell her house and move into a care home. Yet Fred cannot provide for himself.

"At least she could sell her home," Annabel says. "If you are born with a disability, you're never given the money. This is not how we should look after the most vulnerable in our society."

◀ *Mary, far left, gave up work and sold the family home to fund care for her late husband and is left with little savings. Left, Annabel with her son, Fred, who has his care costs partly deducted from his benefits leaving him too little to live on, she says*

Analysis Patrick Butler

Little policy detail but a clear direction of travel – and excitement in the room

For campaigners perpetually disappointed by the failure to fix England's creaking adult social care system, the fear was that Andy Burnham's speech would be less brave new world, more Groundhog Day.

Burnham acknowledged he had been here before. Back in 2010, as health secretary, he announced proposals to overhaul social care, only for them to collapse amid rightwing media hostility and rows about "death taxes".

The new prime minister might talk a good game about expending political capital on an issue close to his heart, but recent history suggests social care reform always ends up in what the King's Fund thinktank calls the "Westminster graveyard of good intentions" – 22 official reviews in the past 30 years, all come to nothing

Burnham sketched out his broad ambitions in a brisk, partly off-the-cuff speech at a Jewish care home in north London yesterday. There was little policy detail, but enough to show a clear direction of travel.

He would be accelerating Louise Casey's review of social care, which under Keir Starmer had been slated for 2028, in effect pushing it back into a Labour second term. Lady Casey's recommendations for a National Care Service would be published within 12 months. He would back Casey "100%", he promised.

He was dropping no clues as to what it might look like. Casey would come up with funding options. But it wasn't just about money: the quality of social care had to improve, work more closely with the NHS, and be built around the needs of care users.

There would be investment and focus on the workforce, improving pay and training. He wasn't against private providers (which currently provide most care in England) but he wouldn't put up with "profiteering". There needed to be more support for unpaid carers.

The central message, however, was about politics. Blame for the dire state of English social care lay with his generation of politicians, he said. They had serially ducked the challenge of reform, put point-scoring before fixing injustices and fomented a political culture of risk aversion and inertia.

"How have we've got to a position where it's too difficult to fix the basic care that we give to each other, that fellow human beings receive?" he asked.

He arrived at No 10 promising he would do politics differently, but this was a challenge to the other main political parties to do the same. He wouldn't be drawn on whether he'd raise tax, but it felt like he was prepared to test the idea government might raise tax to fix a social injustice. "If everybody, on the NHS principle, contributed a little, it would mean everyone could protect the majority of what they'd worked for," he said at one point. "Now I know the Mail and probably the Telegraph doesn't support that. But I don't know – do people support that?"

The consensus in the social care world was that it was an impressive start. "There was a sense of excitement in the room," one veteran campaigner told the Guardian. "He had every opportunity to downplay expectations but he didn't."

Burnham framed the injustices simply. He compared the inequity of social care in England to the privatised US healthcare system: "The vulnerable pay with everything and it can completely leave them with nothing."

For once, some observers said, with a flicker of amazement, there was clear political will. There is the rare whiff of hope and optimism.

Sketch
John Crace

At last we have a leader again – a grownup who is prepared to speak to voters as fellow adults

It feels like the UK has a prime minister again. Not the Maybot paralysed with indecision. Not the clown-like Boris Johnson who crumbled under the weight of his own narcissism. Not the ridiculous Liz Truss. Not the steamrollered Rishi Sunak for whom everything was impossible. Not the automaton-like Keir Starmer who was never entirely sure what he wanted to do. But a prime minister who is emotionally intelligent. Who understands the country and can connect with it. Who is prepared to expend political capital to get the things done that other politicians were too weak to go near.

This was Andy Burnham's first big set piece since taking office. And he went straight for social care. An issue that previous governments over the past 30 years have done their utmost to avoid. A royal commission, 22 reviews and absolutely nothing has changed. Too difficult, too many hard choices. Far simpler to keep on with a system that's failing. Let the next government deal with it. "This is personal to me," said Burnham, as he addressed a small audience of care workers and the media at Jewish Care in north London. Personal because his father has dementia and needs daily care.

It's personal for a lot of us. It's personal for me. My mother had Alzheimer's and needed to be in a care home for seven years before she died last year. My sisters and I had to sell her home to pay for the care she got. We didn't resent it. It was what needed to happen, and the care she got from a mostly overseas staff was superb. But my mother would have been bitterly upset had she been aware of what we had done. She had always been so proud she would be able to leave her house to her children.

Then we got to the questions. Some media outlets moan about Burnham avoiding interrogation. But he answered everything

Burnham gets that it's a nightmare. There was so much that didn't work, he said. The 15-minute care packages. The emergency calls. The bedblocking. The care homes that profited from others' misfortunes. The random nature of who could afford what level of care provision. A system that was ultimately unsustainable. Every bit as unfair as the US health system, where time and again it's the vulnerable who are left to pick up the tab.

So there would be three changes. Bringing forward the review to be completed next year. Converging the social care and NHS workforce. And, most importantly, starting cross-party talks. Kemi Badenoch and Ed Davey had written to Burnham at the weekend so he had invited them to be part of the consensus. Presumably Nigel Farage had not written, preferring to snipe from the sidelines about a death tax.

Then we got to the questions. Here Burnham was also a revelation. Some media outlets have been moaning about Burnham avoiding being interrogated. But he answered everything. No rambling. No answering questions he wished he had been asked. Just straightforward responses. Grownup to grownup. Yes, it was going to be difficult. Yes, he did believe in consensus – doing the big stuff involved dropping the political point-scoring. And yes, though some of the costs could be met from efficiency savings, there would inevitably be hard choices on tax to be made.

Burnham left with a smile. Maybe this had been the easy bit. Starting the ball rolling. But it was better than ignoring it. If he were to do nothing in his time in office but fix social care, he would have achieved more than most other prime ministers.

Polanski rules out apology to Farage over photo as Met police drop case

Aletha Adu
Political correspondent

No further action will be taken by police after Zack Polanski shared a photo of a man with a T-shirt showing a guillotine and the phrase "we're only making plans for Nigel".

The Metropolitan police's decision comes after the Green party leader for England and Wales said he had made an "inadvertent mistake" and would not apologise to Nigel Farage.

Polanski told the BBC's Newsnight programme on Tuesday he had accepted a request on Instagram to "collaborate" with a photographer on the platform. The first photo in a set of 20 showed Polanski, and the fifth showed a man in the T-shirt.

The image was later removed from Polanski's feed, with the Greens saying the T-shirt was "clearly in poor taste".

A Met spokesperson said: "We absolutely understand the reaction to this image being shared online, particularly in the context of increasing threats toward politicians.

"While there will be people who will argue that those who shared the image in this Instagram post should be subject to criminal action, our review has concluded that on this occasion, the threshold is not met."

Polanski repeatedly ruled out apologising to Farage. "If I'd done it deliberately, I'd be apologising," he said. "But because this was a mistake, I think the important thing is that I point out it's a mistake, that I also make sure that I condemn political violence and also crucially make a commitment to be better on my social media."

Reform UK had reported Polanski to the Met. Zia Yusuf, the party's home affairs spokesperson, accused him of "inciting murder". Farage called for Polanski to be arrested.

But the Met said that after "conducting inquiries" it had concluded that it was unlikely the sharing of the image online would constitute a criminal offence.

However, it added that the wearing of the T-shirt should be recorded as a crime and had referred a crime report to Avon and Somerset police, which covers Bristol, where the photo was taken.

Writing in the Daily Mail, Farage said Polanski must "face the consequences of his appalling decisions", adding: "Political violence is real, it is serious, it needs dealing with."

Polanski stressed on Newsnight: "This was not my post – it was a collaboration from a photographer. It had 20 images and I just didn't look carefully enough and I accepted it.

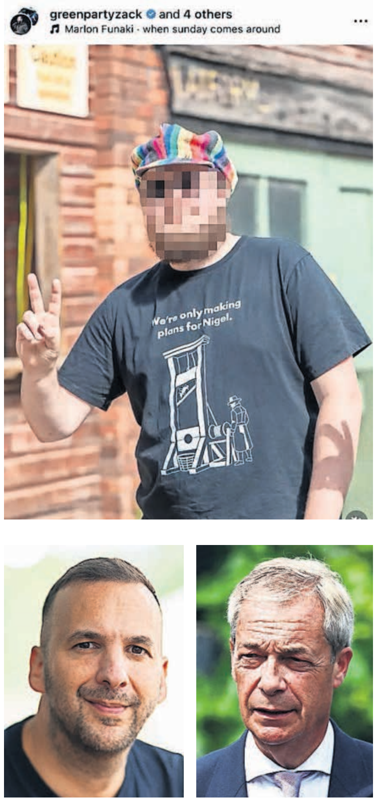
"As soon as I was aware of what happened, I unaccepted it and took it down. I think it would be odd for the police to speak to me about that because I think it's quite obvious that I've not done anything wrong other than making an inadvertent mistake. That being said, if the police do want to talk to me, of course I'm very happy to cooperate.

"If Nigel Farage wants to apologise for all the times that he's put other people in danger than I'll be happy to make an apology."

The work and pensions secretary, Pat McFadden, when asked about the controversy, said all politicians had "a duty to be careful about what they post". He said people could make mistakes and it was for the police to decide if any action was needed.

One national opinion poll this week showed the Greens' score falling by three percentage points, while a second showed the party holding at 13%, well above the level before Polanski became leader last September.

A Green party spokesperson said: "The police have examined the evidence and concluded that no crime was committed. This was obvious from the start, as was the fact that Reform were always using this as a political football for their own cynical purposes to distract from questions about their own dodgy donations."


greenpartyzack and 4 others
Marlon Funaki · when sunday comes around
We're only making plans for Nigel.

▲ *Top, the picture mocking Nigel Farage, right, which appeared on the Instagram feed of Zack Polanski, left*

'It hurts to lose a job you love' Starmer loyalist fights on after cabinet demotion

Alexandra Topping
Political correspondent

If Bridget Phillipson is angry at losing a job – which, in the briefest of halcyon days at the start of Keir Starmer's Labour government, she called the "honour of my life" – she is doing a good job of hiding it.

"It hurts to lose a job you love," she says. "Being education secretary was amazing … and I'm really proud of what we achieved in that time."

The former education secretary was removed during Andy Burnham's clear-out of Starmer's cabinet when the new prime minister took office last week, and was replaced by Burnham's ally Lucy Powell. But unlike some spurned colleagues, Phillipson didn't walk away from government, instead accepting the diminished brief of women and equalities – now a cabinet position – that she had previously held alongside education.

During a visit to a Rape Crisis centre in Cambridge this week, retaining that role now seems like a canny move. On Monday, the new prime minister appointed the Houghton and Sunderland South MP as the new chair of the Labour party – an apparent olive branch to Starmer allies.

The role of Labour party chair is a nebulous one. In parts election planner, administrator and party cheerleader – its importance rests heavily on the backing of the PM. On Monday, Burnham said Phillipson would play a "vital role" in getting Labour "match fit for the next election".

Labour's communications stressed the appointment showed Burnham's commitment to building "one united team". Phillipson echoed that it was by "uniting together" that Labour would "bring hope back to communities and strengthen British society against those working to divide us".

Unity will involve working harmoniously with Powell, the woman who beat her to become deputy leader in October, and has now replaced her as education secretary. "That contest was almost a year ago. It's in the past, and Lucy's a great colleague," she says. "We've worked together for many years, and she has my full support."

> *'We've got the fight of our lives on our hands to win at the next general election, our country is at a perilous moment'*
>
> **Bridget Phillipson**
> *Labour party chair*

Phillipson also hopes she can act as a bridge between Starmer loyalists – many are making no secret of their anger behind the scenes – and Burnham's team.

"I know how people will feel, those who have lost out – I know it hurts. It hurts to lose a job that you have loved and put heart and soul into," she says. "But I know that however people feel at the moment, they want to win the next election as much as I do."

Despite being a gentler character than some of her predecessors in the role, including Angela Rayner and Tom Watson, Phillipson insists she won't "pull her punches". She points to her record in landing the fraught issue of reforming special educational needs provision in schools and pushing Starmer and Rachel Reeves to eventually lift the two-child benefit cap. "I'm my own person, and I've always believed that there are different ways of being effective," she says.

The fight against Reform UK – which slipped into second place behind Labour in a voter intention poll for the first time in more than

▼ Bridget Phillipson, the new Labour party chair, at Cambridge Rape Crisis Centre with Nora Al-Ani

PHOTOGRAPH: JILL MEAD/THE GUARDIAN

a year this week – is a message she returns to repeatedly.

"We've got the fight of our lives on our hands to win at the next general election, our country is at a perilous moment," she says. "We've got to modernise and unite our party and our movement, and take the fight to Reform."

She accuses Nigel Farage and his party of "shamefully" weaponising women's pain with their focus on Pakistani grooming gangs and sexual violence committed by foreigners. "We should go after whoever commits violence against women and girls, whatever their background, whatever their ethnicity," she says.

Phillipson insists that Labour's manifesto commitment to halve violence against women and girls (VAWG) in a decade still stands, despite Burnham making no reference to it so far. That her role has been made into a cabinet position "demonstrates his commitment", she says, adding that ministers will be tracking VAWG crimes reported in the British Crime Survey.

"I am very sad at how things ended for Keir because he has achieved something that very few Labour leaders ever do, which is going from opposition into government and winning a landslide," she says. But she makes it clear that her loyalties now lie with the new man in No 10. "I believe it is right that you support the leader of your party and you support your prime minister," she says. "It is therefore now right that Andy commands that loyalty from all of us."

Continued *from page 1*

Trident at heart of plan for industrial renewal – PM

you to know that there is a path for you into a reindustrialised Britain, and it starts with the apprenticeships we are funding through this investment today," the prime minister added.

The visit also presents an opportunity to reinforce Burnham's pro-Trident credentials. The prime minister voted to build the new submarines in 2016, when the Labour party split over the issue and its then leader, Jeremy Corbyn, voted against.

Wes Streeting, the new defence secretary, and John Healey, the chancellor, were also among the MPs who voted in favour, though another important figure in Burnham's team, Louise Haigh, who runs the new office of the prime minister, voted against.

The UK's military nuclear activities currently support 47,000 jobs, including 13,500 in the Barrow shipyard. Its surrounding constituency has historically switched from Labour to Conservative, and was retaken by Labour at the last general election in 2024.

▲ *HMS Vigilant at the Clyde naval base, one of the UK's ageing Vanguard-class nuclear submarines*

PHOTOGRAPH: JEFF J MITCHELL/GETTY IMAGES

Burnham, who has had limited previous engagement with foreign and defence policy, entered office just over a week ago and immediately leaned into a Nato commitment to increase defence spending by over £25bn a year to reach 3.5% of GDP by 2035.

A row over whether his predecessor, Keir Starmer, was serious about the commitment had led to the resignation of Healey as defence secretary last month. This precipitated Starmer's own resignation.

£31bn

Cost of Dreadnought submarine programme, which No 10 says is a case study in regional investment

When Healey quit, he had also called for military budgets to hit 3% of GDP by 2030 as an interim target, to show the UK was committed to the Nato goal. Starmer had only been willing to offer an increase to 2.68% of GDP.

But at a press conference yesterday, Burnham declined to commit to hitting the 3% target by 2030. Instead he referred to the UK promise to meet the Nato target of 3.5% by 2035, reiterating comments already made by Streeting and Healey.

"When it comes to defence, obviously those commitments … relate to the parliament after this one," Burnham said. "In terms of our Nato commitments, I have been very clear that we will honour those commitments." He added: "It does mean being prepared to look at challenging issues."

The new Dreadnought submarines are intended to replace the ageing Vanguard-class submarines, one of which is always at sea carrying Britain's nuclear weapons. Each of the existing submarines can carry 40 nuclear warheads, with enough power to destroy Moscow and several other major Russian cities.

The largest share of the latest phase of work in the Dreadnought programme is being awarded to BAE Systems, the owner of the Barrow shipyard. The British defence giant has been given a new £5.9bn contract to complete the first of the four new vessels, HMS Dreadnought, so it can be ready for service in the early 2030s.

The work is part of the overall £31bn Dreadnought programme, which is so complex it includes a £10bn contingency to cover overspends. Concern about the scale of the programme has meant it has already been placed on amber alert by government procurement monitors.

Trident warheads are designed and built at AWE in Aldermaston and Burghfield in Berkshire, which employs 9,000 people, while a further 4,000 workers at Rolls-Royce in Derby help to build the nuclear reactors that power the Dreadnought and other submarines used by the Royal Navy.

Greater Manchester

Labour expected to retain mayoralty in byelection

Josh Halliday
North of England editor

Voting is taking place today in the biggest byelection in British political history, with more than 2 million people eligible to choose Andy Burnham's successor as the mayor of Greater Manchester.

Such a large and politically significant byelection normally would have dominated the headlines for weeks, particularly as senior Labour figures until recently feared losing the prize mayoralty to Nigel Farage's Reform UK.

But now Labour's Bev Craig is expected to win comfortably in a contest that has been largely overshadowed by Burnham's rapid ascent to prime minister.

Labour has benefited from a "Burnham bounce" in the polls and Reform UK's focus has shifted to Clacton in Essex, where Farage is fighting a self-imposed parliamentary byelection against 34 other candidates, including Count Binface.

A poll by More in Common published on Tuesday gave Craig, the leader of Manchester city council, a 20-percentage point lead over Reform UK's Sian Astley. Most of the 1,000-voter survey was carried out before Burnham became prime minister. The Greens were in third on 14 points, just ahead of the Conservatives.

The contest was triggered by Burnham winning the Makerfield byelection on 18 June, meaning he had to step down as mayor of the most powerful combined authority outside London.

The byelection is taking place under the supplementary voting system, which means that if no single party achieves 50% of the vote then second-choice preferences will come into play.

Labour is widely seen as having an advantage under this system as the party is more likely to be picked as the second choice of Greens, Liberal Democrats and even some Conservatives. Reform UK, by contrast, cannot count on such broad support.

The More in Common poll found Labour's lead would stretch to 30 points if Reform UK finished second, as Craig is the most popular second-choice of most Greens and a sizable number of Conservatives.

Anything short of a second place finish would be a blow to Reform UK, which won more than 100 seats in Greater Manchester in the May elections, including all but one of the 25 contested in Wigan and 18 out of 19 in Tameside, once solidly Labour areas.

▲ *Labour's Bev Craig is expected to see off the Reform UK candidate in today's byelection and become the next mayor of Greater Manchester*

Reform UK's projected vote has fallen nationally in recent weeks – the hard-right party was overtaken at the top of the polls by Labour this week for the first time since March 2025 – as Farage has faced intense scrutiny over his funding.

Green sources said they believed the Greater Manchester polls had underestimated the party's popularity and that its support extended far beyond Manchester city centre, where it won a swathe of what had been Labour seats in May, and is near the parliamentary constituency of Gorton and Denton it won in a February byelection.

For the Greens, who won 7% of the vote against Burnham when the Manchester mayoralty was last contested in 2024, a doubling or more of its vote share would demonstrate an ability to expand outside its recently formed, urban-liberal power base.

All parties will be scrutinising the result tomorrow with a view to the next set of local elections next May, when a third of all seats in Greater Manchester's 10 boroughs will be up for grabs in what could present an electoral headache for Burnham.

Reform UK will be eyeing control of councils including Bolton, Wigan and Rochdale next year, while the Greens will hope to threaten Labour's half-century control of Manchester city council, where it is now the second biggest party.

Yet campaigners in Labour and Green camps say awareness of today's vote is low, potentially complicating pollsters' predictions. The result is expected tomorrow afternoon.

Unlike in Makerfield and Gorton and Denton, there is little obvious sign on the streets that such a mammoth byelection is under way, largely due to the huge expense of campaigning across a region of 2 million voters.

Given some residents will have voted three times in the past five months, many expect turnout to be lower than the 32% in 2024. Yet if even a third of registered voters cast their ballot, the verdict of 600,000 people would be worth taking seriously.

Warm weather brings extra sightings of moth from southern Europe

Chris Baraniuk

He had just sat down to dinner in the garden when a speedy visitor whizzed by - a "grey lump with orange wings", recalled Luke Burstow, from Sussex. It was a hummingbird hawk-moth, a flying insect that migrates to the UK from continental Europe and north Africa. "I was like: 'Wow!'," said the software project manager. "I didn't even know they existed."

Burstow is one of many UK wildlife watchers who have described seeing the moth on social media lately. "This made my day," wrote one Reddit user after their sighting.

Butterfly and moth experts told the Guardian that 2026 could be a bumper year for hummingbird hawk-moths in the UK after a boom in sightings during recent weeks. Hot weather and strong winds appear to have brought many of the insects here from more southerly climes.

Burstow, who, along with his wife, spied the hummingbird hawk-moth enjoying buddleia flowers on 30 June, said: "It was just so different to everything else you normally see." After Googling the species, Burstow ran to grab his camera and managed to take some photos. He marvelled at how, even with a fast shutter speed, the moth's wings - which beat roughly 80 times per second - still appeared slightly blurry in his photos.

"We've had a big increase in sightings and inquiries about the hummingbird hawk-moth sent to us this year," said Richard Austin, a recording schemes officer at the charity Butterfly Conservation. "We expect it is going to be a great summer for them."

Austin cautioned, however, that it was too early to compare their numbers with previous years.

Hummingbird hawk-moths may be spotted all around the UK, including in Northern Ireland and even northern Scotland.

▼ *'A grey lump with orange wings': a migratory hummingbird hawk-moth photographed in Sussex*
PHOTOGRAPH: LUKE BURSTOW

Warm southerly winds associated with recent heatwaves could have helped bring high numbers of the moths to the UK, said Richard Harrington, an honorary fellow of the Royal Entomological Society. "It may also be that their food plants are drying out in their Mediterranean breeding areas," he said.

Sunny weather in the UK has perhaps encouraged people to spend more time than usual in their gardens, raising the chances that they will spot one of the moths, according to Ray Barnett, a council member at the British Entomological and Natural History Society. "I'm in Bristol and there's lots of people recording it locally," he said.

There is a chance the hummingbird hawk-moths could stick around, should the UK continue to experience milder winters as a result of global heating, Barnett added.

Hibernating adults that make it through the British winter may go on to reproduce in the UK on a regular basis.

Hummingbird hawk-moth larvae feed on plants including lady's bedstraw and hedge bedstraw, which are common wildflowers in the UK.

"If these weather patterns continue, then [the moth] is going to survive winters regularly," said Barnett. "It's almost becoming a resident species rather than a purely migratory species."

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Study links excessive time spent online to higher stress

Tobi Thomas
Health and inequalities correspondent

Spending excessive time online is associated with higher stress levels, worse mood, and greater neglect of other activities, according to analysis.

The new study by academics at the University of Duisburg-Essen published in the journal PLOS One, surveyed 900 German adults in 2025 who reported engaging in gaming, pornography use, social network use, or online shopping at least once in the past year.

Depending on the frequency of their usage, their internet use was labelled as either pathological, risky, or non-problematic. Problematic internet usage was defined by the study as the excessive use of online applications to the point of functional impairment or distress.

The study's participants then completed an assessment every evening for two weeks, where they reported their mood and stress levels, temptation to engage in problematic internet use, and their total time spent on the internet more generally.

The assessment also measured how much pleasure was derived from internet usage and whether any other activities were neglected as a result.

Participants with more severe problematic internet usage were associated with worse mood, more stress, longer internet use times and greater neglect of other areas of life. The study also found that temptation was the main driver for continued internet use, with feelings of pleasure and relief emerging as reinforcing factors.

Andreas Oelker, co-author of the study, said: "More than actual stress or mood alone, it is the momentary urge to go online that determines whether people engage in online activities and experience both rewarding and harmful consequences.

> *'Helping people to recognise and manage temptation to go online may be more effective'*
>
> **Andreas Oelker**
> *Study co-author*

"Understanding why individuals at risk of problematic internet use go online at particular moments is essential for developing better prevention and treatment strategies. Our findings suggest that helping people recognise and manage temptation may be more effective than focusing on stress or mood alone."

The study's results confirmed the researchers' hypothesis that daily stress, mood and temptation could be used to predict a person's daily internet usage, and further, how these factors in turn affect daily pleasure, relief and neglect of other activities. Researchers stress that not all types of internet usage have negative outcomes, but rather problematic or excessive usage.

Silke M Müller, co-author of the study, said: "We'd like to note that only a small percentage of internet users develop pathological use patterns. Using the internet brings joy, fun, and/or relief from stress in an enriching way as long as other important areas of life are not systematically neglected.

"These areas include not only essential duties and responsibilities, but also other activities that have been proven to have a positive effect on our wellbeing and health, such as exercise, spending time outdoors, or doing things with friends."

Previous studies have suggested that young people with internet addiction experience changes in their brain chemistry which could lead to more addictive behaviours, and that these effects were evident throughout multiple neural networks in the brain alongside increased activity in parts of the brain when participants were resting.

Zadie Smith and Patti Smith among Dua Lipa's guests at literary festival

Emma Loffhagen

◀ *Dua Lipa, the curator of this year's Southbank literary festival, will speak to big names including Zadie Smith, below left, and Patti Smith, right, who will discuss her memoir*
PHOTOGRAPH: ARTURO HOLMES/ GETTY IMAGES

Zadie Smith, Patti Smith and Mustafa are among the star names lined up to be interviewed by as the pop star reveals her curation of this year's London literature festival at the Southbank Centre.

The festival, now in its 19th year, will run from 21 October to 1 November, with the Brit award-winning singer shaping a programme of events in collaboration with her Service95 book club.

Lipa said curating the programme had been "a true joy", adding that she wanted to bring together "some of the most exciting writers, poets and thinkers from around the globe", alongside more familiar names.

She will sit down with Zadie Smith on 24 October to discuss her 2000 debut novel, White Teeth, published when Smith was just 24.

The pair are expected to reflect on "learning to live with an artistic legacy earned at such a young age", and how the novel's characters might fare in Britain today.

The night after, she will interview Patti Smith about her memoir Bread of Angels, which charts Smith's life from childhood, through her marriage to Fred "Sonic" Smith, and her return to music after his death.

The programme will also feature appearances from the Sudanese Canadian poet and musician Mustafa, the Nobel peace laureate Nadia Murad discussing her memoir, I Choose My Beginning, and a conversation between Ta-Nehisi Coates and Tareq Baconi on Baconi's new book about Palestine.

Other events include a translated fiction showcase, a poetry and music night with Kae Tempest, and Censorship Live!, a collaboration with English PEN examining threats to free expression.

Lipa has increasingly established herself as an advocate for reading. She launched her book club in 2023 as an extension of her wider cultural platform Service95, which sees monthly selections and long-form author interviews with writers including Margaret Atwood, George Saunders and Olga Tokarczuk.

Last month, she opened a permanent collection of 100 banned, censored and challenged books inside the historic Livraria Lello bookshop in Porto, Portugal.

Mark Ball, the Southbank Centre's artistic director, said Lipa's "deep curiosity about the world" made her a fitting curator for the venue's 75th anniversary. "It's a milestone year and she's the perfect curator to help us celebrate it," he added.

The literature festival also includes free family events and a wider national programme, part of Southbank Centre's efforts to reach a million people across the UK in 2026.

Last year, the festival was curated by Self Esteem, and previous headliners include Ai Weiwei, Greta Thunberg, Malala Yousafzai, Margaret Atwood, Philip Pullman, Tom Hanks and Yulia Navalnaya.

Boy dies after Essex coast incident that killed his aunt and cousin

Jamie Grierson

A seven-year-old boy has died a week after an incident off the Essex coast in which his cousin and her mother died as they tried to rescue him.

Musa Ahmed was being treated for life-threatening injuries after being pulled from the sea near West Mersea beach on 22 July.

Shelina Rahman, 41, and her 15-year-old daughter, Sameeha, died after the incident.

In a statement, the boy's family said: "We would like to thank the Royal London hospital intensive care unit team of doctors and nurses who demonstrated outstanding care and dignity whilst we have been at the hospital."

They added: "We would also like to thank the whole community for their support and prayers. We would appreciate privacy during this very difficult time."

It had been reported that Rahman and her daughter were attempting to help Musa after he got into difficulty.

Rahman's husband is Mansur Rahman, the leader of Jubo Dal UK, the overseas youth wing of the Bangladesh Nationalist party in Britain.

The family are understood to have been on a summer holiday trip to West Mersea, when three adults and three children got into difficulty after a heavy incoming tide caused the sand beneath their feet to give way, sweeping them into the water.

Earlier this week, Shahin Ahmed, Musa's father, shared a statement that called for a review of safety measures at the beach.

"I strongly agree with the calls from local residents for a review of safety measures at West Mersea beach, including the provision of additional life-saving equipment and clear warning signage," he said.

"While no action now can undo the pain we are suffering, we hope lessons can be learned to help prevent similar tragedies from happening in the future."

Essex police said officers were called by the ambulance service at 5.35pm on 22 July after reports that several people had got into difficulty in the water near Seaview Avenue.

The East of England Ambulance Service said one patient was transported by air and three by road to hospital after the incident at Sea View Holiday Park.

DCI Al Pitcher, who is leading the investigation into the incident, said: "All our thoughts are with the family and friends of those involved – as has been the case since this incident took place last week. Their bravery and strength has been humbling.

"We continue to build a complete picture of the circumstances which led up to this incident and our work is continuing alongside our partners."

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Whole-life sentence for triple murderer who dismembered bodies and hid them in woods

Steven Morris

A triple killer who murdered and dismembered the bodies of two of his friends before strangling a third man to death in prison while awaiting trial has been told he will spend the rest of his life behind bars.

Mr Justice Saini, who sentenced James Desborough, 40, at Winchester crown court, said the circumstances of the case were unique.

Handing Desborough a rare whole-life order, he said the killer was a highly dangerous person who had considered his victims "worthless".

The judge said Desborough killed his two friends because they were vulnerable, homeless, physically slight individuals who he considered would not necessarily be missed given their chaotic personal lives.

"I also find you did not consider them to be worthy of respect as humans," the judge said. Saini added that a whole-life order was a "last resort", used only when the seriousness of a case was "exceptionally high".

Devon and Cornwall police have revealed they are reviewing the deaths of four people who were living in a homeless shelter at the same time as Desborough and his two victims.

Det Supt Rachael Bentley, the head of the major crime investigation team, said at this stage the force did not believe Desborough had killed any of the four, "but it's an ongoing investigation".

Desborough killed Claudio Aquilino, 57, and Daniel Coleman, 43, cut up their bodies and hid them in woodland close to a shack where he sometimes lived in south Cornwall.

While in Exeter prison before his trial he murdered his cellmate, Steven Kempster, 65, apparently because his snoring annoyed him.

During the sentencing hearing, emotional victim statements were read out that made clear the men who were killed were loved and did have worthwhile lives.

Coleman's 14-year-old daughter said: "I love him. I was a daddy's girl; now I can't be. It hurts to see I'll never see him smile again." She said it terrified her to think her father would have been frightened when he was killed and told Desborough he was a "miscreant killer".

Aquilino's family said he had been a talented artist and a good cook, although addiction problems had made his life very difficult.

Sean Brunton KC, for Desborough, said he had been in trouble only once before, 20 years before the murders.

The barrister said Desborough was "highly intelligent" and as a younger man had had great potential and found some success. In court he was polite and easy to deal with.

Brunton said it was not possible to say if the "bleak events" had been brought on by drink and drugs or because Desborough had wrongly perceived the men he killed had nothing to live for.

More than 700 officers and scientists were involved in the 175-day search of the woods, with Devon and Cornwall police drawing on resources from five other forces. The weather was very hot and the nature of the terrain jungle-like and boggy.

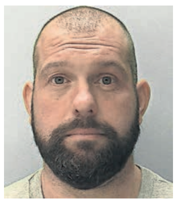
The force said they had even diverted a stream to enable the systematic sieving of 300 metres of its bed, which they said was a first. They discovered 1,900 burned bone fragments from the body of Aquilino and the remains of Coleman.

Aquilino and Coleman, who suffered from long-term addictions, had previously lived with Desborough at a homeless hostel in Newquay.

Desborough used the men's money to buy drugs and alcohol after their deaths.

▼ *Claudio Aquilino, left and Daniel Coleman were dismembered by Desborough close to his Cornwall hut*

PHOTOGRAPH: PA MEDIA



◀ *Sentencing James Desborough, 40, Mr Justice Saini said he considered his victims to have been 'worthless'*

Heathrow travellers face higher fares as it recovers expansion fee

Gwyn Topham

Heathrow passengers face decades of higher fares after the regulator overrode airline objections to allow the airport to charge for planning work to build its proposed third runway.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said it had permitted Heathrow Airport Limited (HAL) to recover early costs of up to £320m spent on developing its expansion plan since 2025.

The money spent on planning will be recouped through higher charges to airlines, which are typically passed on to passengers in air fares, for about between 20 and 25 years.

The CAA said it would also allow a rival expansion scheme, Heathrow West, led by the property billionaire Surinder Arora, to claim back the £4.1m it spent on its plan in 2025 before the government announced that HAL's proposal was its preferred option. Arora's refund, which the CAA said was needed to promote competition, will be paid out from Heathrow's additional charges.

Current charges are around £26.22 per passenger. The CAA said its decision would increase the maximum airport charge per passenger by about 15p in 2028, rising to an estimated 30p in subsequent years.

The move will fuel airline fears that construction of a third runway, which HAL estimates will cost about £33bn, will pile on charges and drive up fares. British Airways, the largest airline at Heathrow, said early cost recovery would create a risk that expansion would be "unaffordable for consumers and inconsistent with a credible benefits case", according to a CAA document.

Airlines have repeatedly complained that Heathrow has the highest charges of any airport in the world. Tim Johnson, CAA's director of consumers and markets, said: "Our decision strikes a balance between supporting the delivery of benefits to consumers through timely progress on Heathrow expansion, whilst protecting them from undue increases."

A spokesperson for the airport said the expansion scheme would give passengers more choice while providing a "real economic boost to every region".

Additional reporting **PA Media**

▲ *Airlines typically pass on charges from airports to customers via fares*

BTS rebuke Grammys as they withdraw from consideration

Ben Beaumont-Thomas

BTS, the biggest pop act in east Asia, have withdrawn themselves from 2027's Grammy awards, intimating that their decision is due to the addition of a new award for best Asian pop performance.

Writing on Instagram, each of the South Korean group's seven members said: "We have decided not to enter the Grammys this year. I hope that music can be heard and loved for what it is, rather than being divided by region or language."

The comments are a striking – if gently worded – rebuke of the Academy's new category.

Announcing the award last month, along with another regional award for best Latin song, the Recording Academy president, Harvey Mason Jr, said the decision was due to "our music community sharing with us that they felt they needed to have more opportunities to celebrate different and new genres of music".

That was perhaps unfortunate wording, given Asian and Latin pop markets are far from "new": each command vast revenues and audiences, including in the US, after decades of maturity. There have therefore been fears in the Asian pop sphere that the category could end up ringfencing Asian pop artists away from contention in the top categories.

The Recording Academy has not commented on BTS's decision. The Guardian has requested comment.

Asian pop artists have traditionally been ignored by the US-centric awards show – no K-pop act was even nominated until BTS in 2021 – but they had a good showing. Golden, from hit film KPop Demon Hunters, won best song written for visual media: the first win for a K-pop act. Golden was also up for one of the "big four" prizes, song of the year, alongside another K-pop artist, Rosé, for her Bruno Mars duet APT.

The majority of lyrics in Golden and APT are in English, so they may not have qualified for the Asian pop category which requires "meaningful use" of an Asian language.

But BTS's recent album Arirang is overwhelmingly in Korean, making them a near-certainty for inclusion.

The ceremony will take place on 7 February in Los Angeles.

Three firefighters killed in Crete as crews across Europe struggle to contain wildfires

Ajit Niranjan
Jennifer Rankin

Three firefighters died yesterday while tackling wildfires in Crete and the southern mainland, the Greek fire department said, as extreme heat hindered efforts to control blazes ravaging Europe.

The arc of brutal fires, which runs from the Atlantic coast to the eastern Mediterranean, and from Scotland to the south of Spain, has alarmed experts because many of the fires have been out of control and burning close to towns and cities.

Temperatures pushed higher by climate breakdown reached 38C in Bordeaux yesterday, where firefighters have kept a blaze in nearby pine forests from reaching the suburbs, and 37C in Madrid, to the west of which Spain's largest wildfire on record had been "technically stabilised", according to the interior minister, Fernando Grande-Marlaska.

Dozens of ground crews contained the fire burning west of the Spanish capital overnight, emergency services for the region said, but a separate fire near València was still out of control.

Speaking from the Navalcarnero command centre, Spain's prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, said the situation near the capital was improving but stressed it was the first time a wildfire had been raised to "operational level 3", with the national government taking over the response.

Accompanied by strong winds, the fourth heatwave of western Europe's summer has alarmed firefighters, who said it made blazes harder to quell and raised the risk of fires restarting in areas that had been stabilised.

New fires have also prompted evacuations in Turkey and Greece, where authorities said three firefighters "fell heroically in the line of duty" while trying to extinguish a blaze in the Rethymnon region in Crete.

A calm night on Tuesday allowed French flare-ups to be extinguished, but officials warned of unfavourable developing weather conditions that could hamper progress.

The prefecture of Gironde said 126 firefighters had been injured since the start of the fire but the total area engulfed remained stable at 42,000 hectares (104,000 acres) yesterday.

Wildfires have burned a record-breaking area of France, data from the European Forest Fire Information System shows, while France and Spain have experienced record-breaking numbers of fires. More than 330,000 people in southern Europe have been evacuated from homes and hotels.

Officials began to lift evacuation orders on Tuesday as fires were brought under control, allowing tens of thousands of people from towns near Bordeaux, Madrid and València to return home. Some found only burnt-out buildings. José Fernández, a 74-year-old pensioner, told Agence France-Presse he had "no money, no documents, no home" after he came back to the remains of his house in Pelayos de la Presa. "This place has been reduced to a total ruin."

The wildfire season is growing longer as CO_2 pollution heats Europe twice as fast as the global average. Repeated heatwaves this year have dried vegetation and turned forests and shrubland into tinderboxes. EU officials said wildfires could still be burning in November.

Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, yesterday thanked firefighters for their "courage and commitment".

"As the fires in France and Spain continue to ravage, European solidarity knows no limit," she said on social media. "Romania and Greece have decided to extend their missions, continuing their support to the affected regions. And from Saturday Poland will join the fray."

This week, the commission said it had sent France seven planes and four helicopters from as far away as Sweden and Turkey, while in Spain, it said it had mobilised six planes from Greece, Italy and Turkey, along with 134 personnel and 41 vehicles from Portugal. A Super Puma helicopter from Serbia was expected to arrive in Madrid yesterday, with 40 personnel and 18 vehicles to follow.

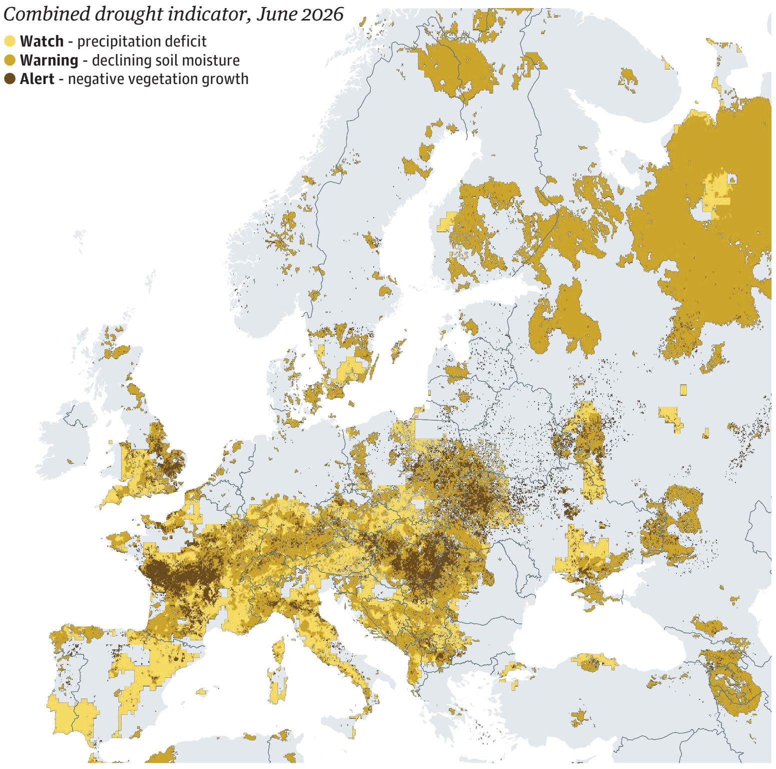
Moisés Galán Santano, a fire expert at Europe's emergency response coordination centre, said more needed to be done to prevent wildfires and that it would remain a task for many years. "The [emergency] response is not only the answer. It's the last answer," he said. "We need to focus on prevention."

This year, a commission policy paper set out how countries could better prevent and recover from fires, which are expected to become bigger and more damaging. It promoted measures such as more extensive grazing, the restoration of wetlands, rivers and floodplains, better data on forest fires and raising public awareness of risky behaviour and safe evacuation.

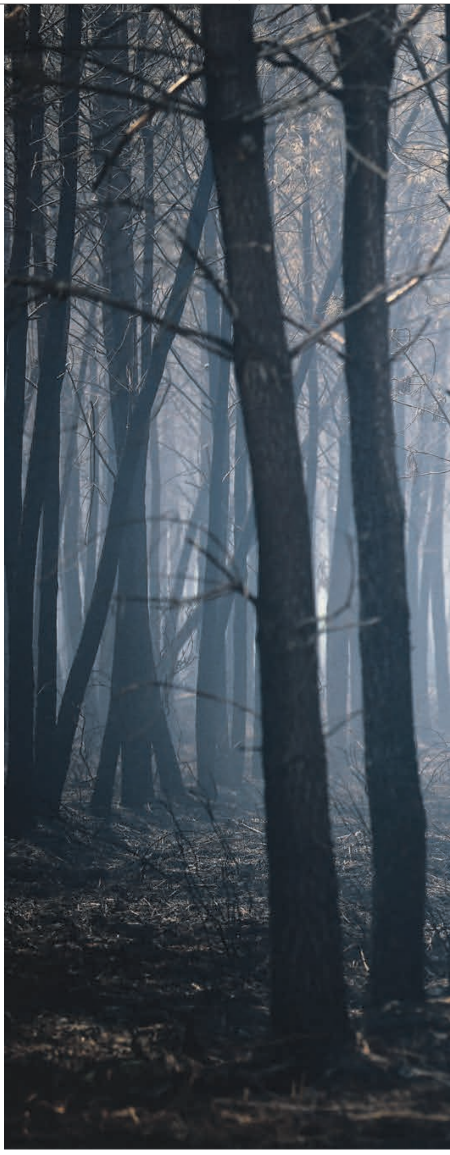
Scientists say western Europe's scorching summer has been exacerbated by fossil fuel pollution. Rapid analyses have found June's heatwave would have been "virtually impossible" without climate breakdown, while the level of soil dryness - a driver of bigger blazes - was made five times more likely.

Drought conditions in Europe have heightened the risk of fires

Combined drought indicator, June 2026


● Watch - precipitation deficit
● Warning - declining soil moisture
● Alert - negative vegetation growth

Source: European Drought Observatory, 21-30 June 2026



'It's like hell'

Residents return to homes after blazes west of Madrid

Sam Jones
Navas del Rey

The handwritten sign taped to the front gate of a house in the mountains an hour west of Madrid offered as succinct a summary of recent events as you will find.

"EMPTY," it said. "No people or animals here."

The quiet streets of El Morro, a hamlet on the outskirts of the town of Navas del Rey, held further evidence: two burnt-out cars barely identifiable as an Audi and a Seat; blackened gnomes atop a gatepost; charred hedges whose leaves had crumbled to a fine ash; and, everywhere, the smell of burnt, or still smouldering, wood.

Yesterday, almost a week after the area was one of many evacuated as firefighters rushed to contain the blazes that have consumed tens of thousands of hectares of land west of the Spanish capital, the returning residents of El Morro were trying to process what had happened.

Some phoned their insurance companies, some swept up the debris in and around their homes, and some were still too deep in shock.

A man led his elderly father out of a house that had been gutted by fire, telling him it was time to go and get a change of clothes. "We're all doing so-so," said the son, which seemed brave but unlikely.

Towards the outskirts of El Morro, a couple in late middle age walked around what had been their garden. The house had survived bar some smoke staining, but the garden and the patio furniture had been chewed up by the fire.

"We came back to the village, saw what had happened and the breath just went out of us," said the woman.

Mercedes Merino, who has lived in El Morro for 35 of her 70 years, apologised for being able to offer visitors nothing but lukewarm water - the electricity was still off - as she pointed to her blackened garden, with its flame-twisted cypress, dying loquat and sooty swimming pool. Still, at least her house had been spared.

"We've had fires here before, but nothing like this," she said. "I knew what we were coming back to because lots of videos of the village have been going round. We're all feeling really low … some people have lost their houses, like the guy next door."

▲ *Mercedes Merino's house was spared but her garden was badly hit*
PHOTOGRAPH: SAM JONES/THE GUARDIAN

▲ *A man walks through a forest scorched by a wildfire in Lanton, west of Bordeaux, in France. Left, fire crews and emergency vehicles battle a blaze near Muğla, Turkey, that closed the Fethiye-Antalya highway. Right, a deer stands among the ash from blackened trees in France's Gironde department*

PHOTOGRAPHS: SARAH MEYSSONNIER/ REUTERS; YVES HERMAN/REUTERS; ANADOLU/GETTY

▲ *After being evacuated last week, residents are assessing the damage*

PHOTOGRAPH: MIGUEL RIOPA/AFP/GETTY

Like the burnt-out cars, next door bore little resemblance to what it had once been. Rather than a house, it was a tangle of warped and burnt building materials, its roof collapsed into ripples of tile and its chimney absurdly horizontal.

"The firefighters have been amazing," said Merino. "But how do you stop fires like these when you live in mountains covered with pine trees? We must have a guardian angel who was watching over us and protecting our house."

Across the road, Javier Herraiz and his family, who had just returned to El Morro after fleeing south-west to Cáceres, were sitting down to a tortilla and counting their blessings.

The smoke that rose over the mountains towards the end of last week, combined with a visit from the Guardia Civil to warn them that an evacuation order was imminent, had persuaded them to leave sooner rather than later.

Although the damage that greeted them when they returned home yesterday morning was minimal, the state of the mountains and the hamlet had shaken them.

"What we saw when we got here was just Dantesque," said Herraiz, 68. "It's such a beautiful place but … it had come to look like hell."

The damage to the family home amounted to little more than a warped pipe and the loss of a rainwater tank, which had probably helped protect the property as it melted and disgorged its contents over the terrace beneath.

"We've been so lucky," said Herraiz. "Some people have lost their houses and some of them still have mortgages to pay."

Root causes
Why has the damage been so bad this year?

The extreme severity of the blazes is the result of "whiplash" wet-then-dry weather this year, all supercharged by the climate crisis. Last winter and much of spring in western Europe was very wet, spurring heavy growth of trees, shrubs and other vegetation.

However, by May the first of a series of heatwaves had hit Europe. All heatwaves are made more intense and more likely by the global heating caused by fossil fuel burning. The one at the end of June was the most severe ever recorded in Europe and would not have happened without the heat from over a century of carbon pollution.

The high temperatures meant the hot atmosphere evaporated water from rivers and lakes and sucked plants and soil dry, with the conditions made 80 times more likely by global heating. As a result of the drought conditions, vegetation became tinder and the risk of wildfires soared, leading to a series of wildfires scientists have described as "firewaves".

The situation has been worsened by the unprecedented development of huge "fire clouds" - pyrocumulonimbus - in France. These form from the heat from the fires and become a self-feeding firestorm, sparking further blazes.

Many thousands of residents and visitors have had to evacuate, often prompted by urgent alerts sent to their phones. Emergency shelters have been set up, including 78 by the Red Cross in Spain.

The longer-term damage to homes and livelihoods is yet to be reckoned with but it will be large. The wildfires around Bordeaux have already claimed some of the region's famous vineyards, while the tourism and manufacturing industries around Valencia have been hard hit.

A further longer-term impact will be the damage to health. About 1.5 million people a year are estimated to have their lives shortened by wildfire smoke.

Europe is the fastest-warming of all continents, due to an increase in heat dome conditions and the proximity of the Arctic, where reflective ice is melting rapidly.

Simon Stiell, the UN climate chief, said: "The science on the cause is unequivocal: global heating, driven by humanity burning colossal amounts of coal, oil and gas, is making protracted heatwaves, severe floods and violent mega-storms more frequent, more intense and more costly. The awful costs of this climate crisis - both human and economic - are now reaching national emergency levels.

"What needs to be done is equally clear: leave coal, oil and gas behind faster, scale up renewables, and protect people where the impacts are already hitting hardest."

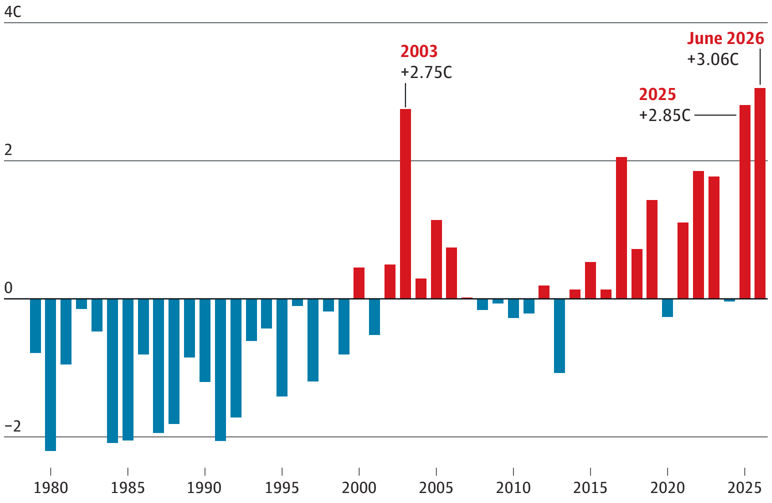
The EU has watered down green measures in the past year in the face of political opposition and corporate lobbying. Hadja Lahbib, European commissioner for crisis preparedness, told the Financial Times: "The commission can only be as ambitious as the member states want it to be. When member states drag their feet [on climate change] … there is a real danger and an incalculable price."

Damian Carrington

▲ *Firefighters in south-west France battle blazes made more widespread by the effects of huge 'fire clouds'*

Western Europe recorded its hottest ever June in 2026

Average surface air temperatures anomalies in June, relative to a 1990-2020 baseline



Source: Copernicus ERA5/ECMWF

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The Prime Minister has pledged to take on the broken social care system, a key contributor to the devastation of dementia.

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Alzheimer’s Society

It will take a society to beat dementia

Alzheimer’s Society. Registered Charity, number: 296645. *Source: Nationally representative online survey of N=1,016 adults 18+ in England conducted via Yonder Data Solutions between 7th – 20th January 2026, commissioned by Alzheimer’s Society.

Prince Harry facing huge legal bill in failed privacy case

Caroline Davies

The Duke of Sussex and his co-claimants could be millions of pounds out of pocket after losing their privacy case against the publishers of the Daily Mail, the high court in London heard.

The seven claimants, who include Prince Harry, Doreen Lawrence and Elton John, sued Associated Newspapers Limited over allegations of unlawful information gathering, with their claims dismissed by Mr Justice Nicklin on 7 July. Now, their insurance may not cover the costs incurred by ANL defending the case.

In a two-day hearing beginning yesterday to determine how costs should be paid, the court heard there was a shortfall between the claimants' £16.2m insurance cover and ANL's reported costs of £34.5m.

Lawyers for ANL say the claimants should pay its costs on an indemnity basis, under which the losing party covers the other side's costs without the need to show those costs are proportionate. ANL are asking for an interim payment of £9,950,624.37. The claimants have offered £8m.

Antony White KC, for ANL, argued that the claimants' conduct justified costs on an indemnity basis, and said the allegations were "of the broadest scope and utmost seriousness".

◀ *The Duke of Sussex and his co-claimants had called the dismissal of their case an 'obvious whitewash'*

They alleged misconduct including "serious wrongdoing amounting in many cases to criminal conduct" against 77 journalists, editors and executives, although only 23 were involved in the claims.

White said the legal action was part of a "campaign" to demonstrate ANL had "misled the Leveson inquiry", using high-profile individuals to persuade the government to implement the second part of the inquiry.

The proceedings were seen as the first wave before a "banquet of litigation", in a strategy to swamp ANL with other potential claims, he said.

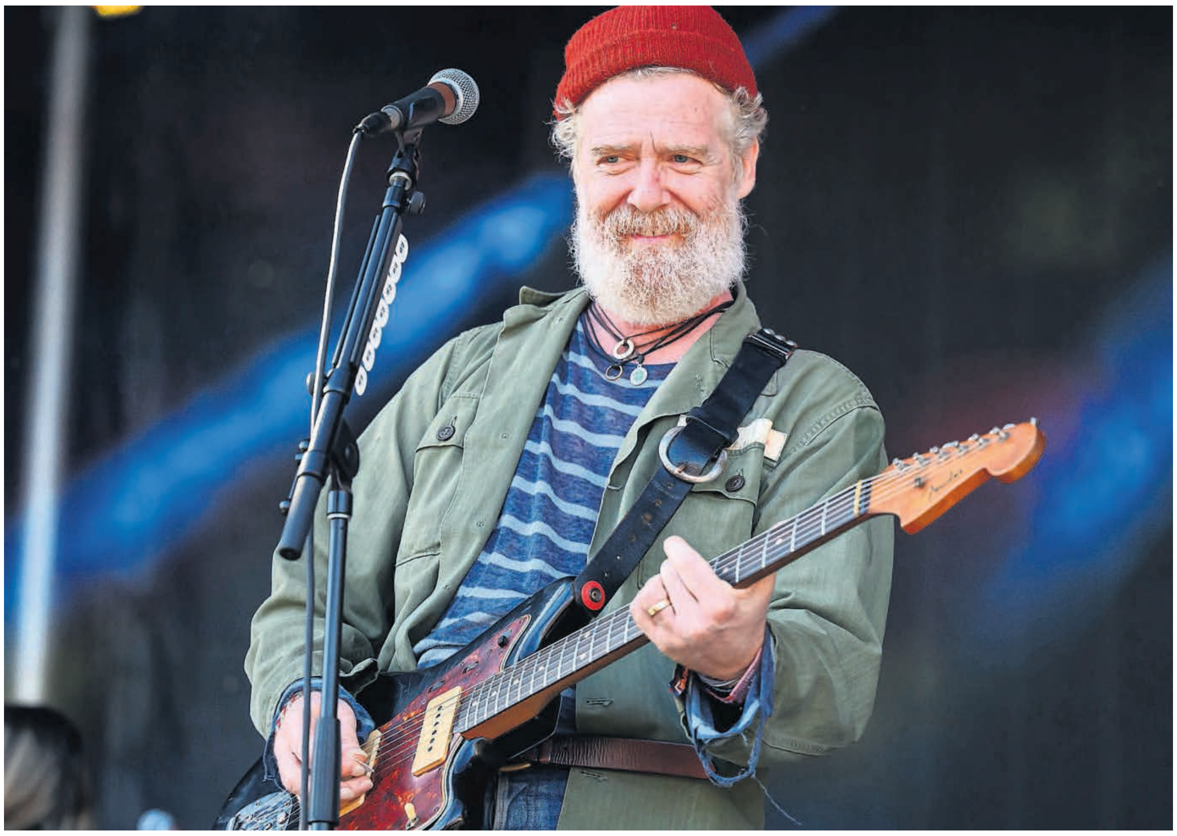
Even if all allegations were not proven, any finding against ANL would be a "catastrophe" for the Daily Mail publisher, White added.

White said he was sad to say that Lawrence, the mother of the murdered teenager Stephen Lawrence, was recruited to the case by Harry as a "national treasure" to garner public sympathy. He pointed to the statement, issued by Harry and Lawrence after the trial, which called the ruling an "obvious whitewash".

Nicholas Bacon KC, for the claimants, said in written submissions that the judge should not award ANL their costs on an indemnity basis. He added that the costs "exceed its approved budget" and reflected "an astonishingly high legal spend", overriding the principle of proportionality that seeks to ensure parties are on an equal footing.

Bacon said that the group had "conducted themselves honestly and in good faith". Referring to the post-trial statement by Harry and Lawrence, he said: "The costs to be ordered at this hearing concern the action itself, not the reaction to it."

The hearing continues.



▲ *Glen Hansard performing in 2024. Those paying tribute to him included the Irish president and the musician Ed Sheeran*

PHOTOGRAPH: EARL GIBSON III/SHUTTERSTOCK

Oscar-winning Irish singer dies aged 56 in motorcycle crash

Ben Beaumont-Thomas

Glen Hansard, the Irish folk-rock musician and actor who fronted the band The Frames and had Oscar-winning success with the 2007 film Once, has died aged 56.

He died in a motorcycle crash in Lucan on the outskirts of Dublin, early yesterday. Without naming him, police said he was treated at the scene but died a short time later.

Hansard won the Oscar for best original song for Falling Slowly, the centrepiece of Once, which starred Hansard opposite another real-life musician, Markéta Irglová, playing struggling musicians in Dublin who embark on a tentative romance; Irglová co-wrote the song and shared the Oscar with Hansard. In 2011 Once was adapted into a stage musical.

Hansard was also the frontman of The Frames, who released six studio albums, including the 2004 Irish chart-topper Burn the Maps.

Hansard's representatives said his family was "deeply shocked and heartbroken by this tragic loss and respectfully requests privacy."

> *'A great musician, a good friend and a gracious man'*
>
> **Bruce Springsteen**

President Catherine Connolly led tributes to Hansard as "one of Ireland's great singer-songwriters".

Bruce Springsteen said on Instagram that he was "heartbroken". "We met in Ireland many years ago and he was always nothing but a great musician, a good friend and a generous and gracious man," he wrote. "Always positive, smiling and ready to sing. God bless him and his loved ones."

Ed Sheeran said on Instagram: "Heartbroken to hear the news about Glen. He was such an incredible human, an incredible force. I am grateful for the times we shared together, sending so much love to his family."

Hansard is survived by his wife, the Finnish poet Maire Saaritsa, and their three-year-old son, Christy.

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Ministers to ask why police cede serious cases to US military courts

Harry Davies
Rob Evans
Emine Sinmaz
Louisa Loveluck

Government ministers and police chiefs are reviewing the process through which US military personnel accused of committing serious crimes on UK soil are avoiding the British justice system.

The effort is examining why UK police forces, which have primary responsibility for investigating such cases, have been ceding jurisdiction to US military investigators.

Such decisions pave the way for alleged perpetrators to be tried in a US military court martial process, an alternative system in which victims often do not have the same protections they would get in a British court.

The government and police reviews were launched after the Guardian uncovered a series of cases in which British police forces allowed the American military to take over investigations into allegations of serious sexual offences.

When the first case was revealed in June, Downing Street said it was "very concerning" that UK authorities were not involved in the prosecution of an American fighter pilot accused of raping and strangling a British woman, Sarah Steele, in his apartment after they met on a dating app.

After Cambridgeshire police allowed US military police to take control of the case, the pilot, Capt Jacob Wulfson, was prosecuted in a court martial on a US airbase in Suffolk. The jury, an all-male panel of air force officers, convicted Wulfson of strangling an intimate partner but acquitted him of sexual assault.

Victims of sexual attacks by US military personnel that would meet a common definition of rape in the UK are finding their attackers are instead being prosecuted for lesser offences.

Under the set of laws that govern US forces, known as the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), rape carries a narrower definition than in British courts, meaning many cases are charged instead as sexual assault.

Wulfson was given a six-month sentence which he is serving at the US base RAF Lakenheath.

In recent weeks, Home Office and justice ministers met Steele to discuss her case and whether changes should be made to how UK police and prosecutors handle cases involving US military personnel.

A government spokesperson said Steele had "shown incredible bravery in coming forward" and ministers had "committed to identifying and learning any lessons from this case to ensure that victims are supported and treated with the seriousness, dignity and compassion they deserve".

▲ *Jacob Wulfson, centre, was convicted of strangling but acquitted of sexual assault in a court martial at his Suffolk airbase* PHOTOGRAPH: US AIR FORCES CENTRAL

The spokesperson said officials were working closely with the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) "to look at the guidance in place to ensure that cases are correctly referred to the Crown Prosecution Service for advice".

Ministers have promised to press the US government for a full account of what happened in the Wulfson case. In a statement, the Foreign Office said it had "been engaging with the US on this matter".

The Guardian has unearthed several other cases involving US air force personnel who avoided UK courts despite their alleged crimes occurring while off duty. In each, local police handed the investigation over to military prosecutors, sometimes within days of receiving a report of a crime on UK soil.

◀ *Sarah Sackman, justice minister, said: 'Our thoughts are with the victims whose experiences have come to light'*

Hannes Marschalek allegedly exposed himself to a 16-year-old girl and four young women in Littleport, Cambridgeshire. He admitted a charge of indecent conduct after negotiating a plea bargain at a court martial. The conviction was later quashed on technical grounds.

Tyrion Davis allegedly raped two British women in Suffolk. He was convicted of one count of sexual assault when he was court martialled but acquitted of 10 further counts of sexual assault and abusive sexual contact.

James Loubeau, who was accused of a string of rapes and sexual assaults in East Anglia, drugging some women and breaking into the homes of others, also avoided the British courts.

He was acquitted at a court martial where he was tried over allegations from just one of the six women who accused him of attacking them. He was later convicted in a court in Miami over another woman's allegations, after an FBI investigation into his alleged attacks on women in England.

▲ *Sarah Steele has been meeting ministers to discuss her experience of the US military justice system as a victim* PHOTOGRAPH: ANTONIO OLMOS/THE GUARDIAN

Suffolk police had handed the Loubeau case over to military prosecutors just 11 days after two British women contacted the force to say he and another US airman had drugged and raped them after a meeting in a nightclub.

In response to the Guardian's reporting on such cases, Gavin Stephens, the chair of the NPCC, has written to all chief constables in England and Wales to ensure forces understand their legal obligations in cases involving visiting US forces.

Sources familiar with discussions in government said ministers were alarmed to learn that UK police forces may not be seeking advice from the CPS before handing over investigations to the US military.

Under legislation dating back to the 1950s, visiting US armed forces in the UK can prosecute their own personnel if the offences were committed while they were on duty or against another member of the military, its property, or a dependant such as a spouse or child.

In all other cases, the British police have the first option on whether to launch an investigation into US military personnel. The cases uncovered by the Guardian suggest the US has pushed to take control of investigations over which it does not have primary jurisdiction. British police appear to be meeting these requests.

Two forces - Suffolk and Cambridgeshire - are conducting reviews of how they handle investigations involving US military personnel.

In a statement, Cambridgeshire police said: "We are conducting a policy review being led by our investigation standards department." The force added that the review was looking at cases from 2018 on, and it did not yet know how many there were.

Suffolk police said: "We are in the process of reviewing the decision-making surrounding the transfer of primacy to the US air force and around case transfer practices more generally."

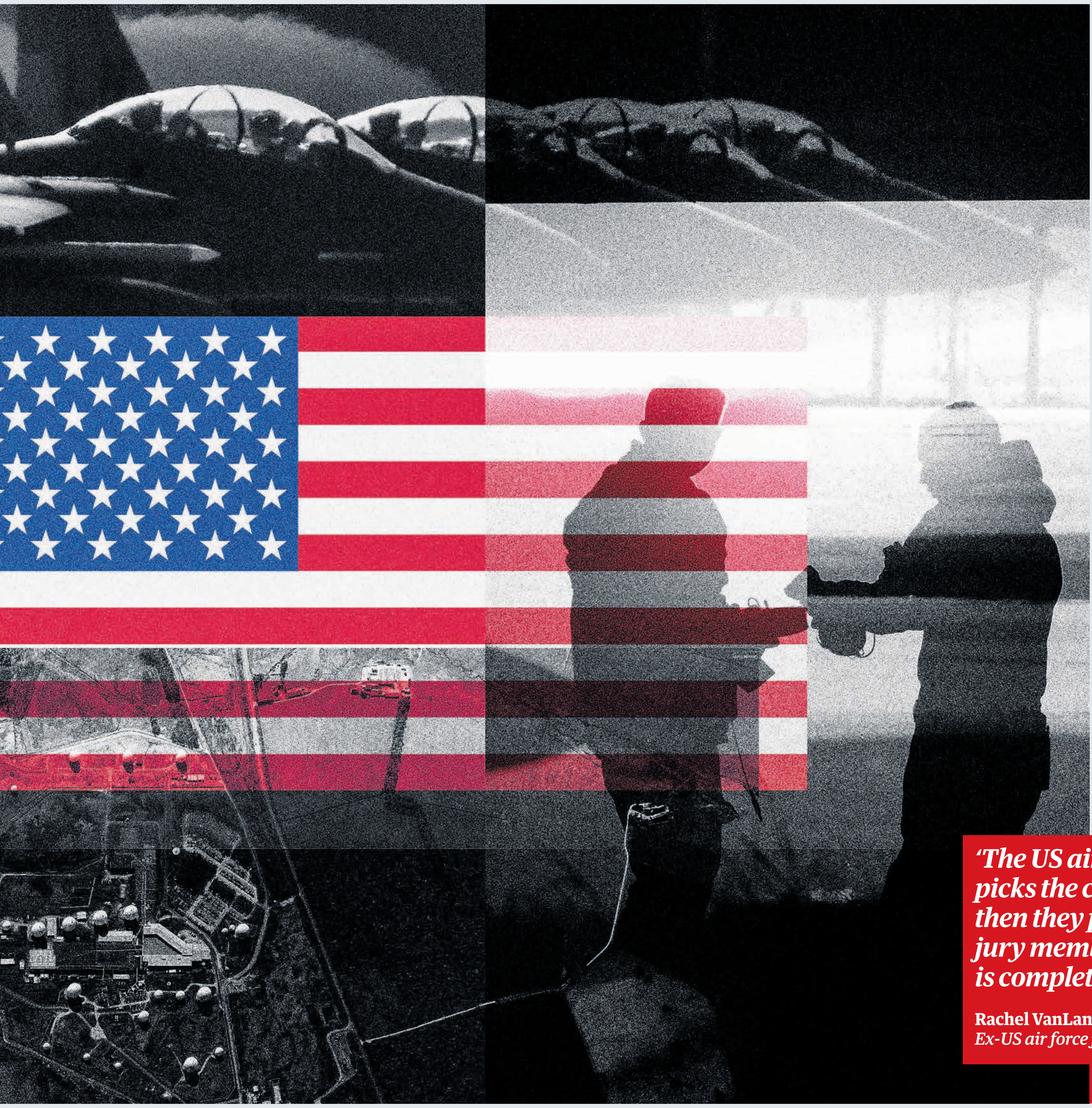
More than 12,000 US military personnel are stationed in the UK, operating from at least 15 bases and facilities. The largest concentration of personnel is at two US military installations in Suffolk, RAF Lakenheath and RAF Mildenhall. Large numbers of US forces live in the surrounding areas, including in Norfolk and Cambridgeshire.

Concern about US service personnel avoiding the British justice system has been raised by MPs from across political parties. Nick Timothy, the Conservative justice spokesperson, said Wulfson "should have been fully investigated by the English police and prosecuted in our courts".

Jess Brown-Fuller, the Liberal Democrats' justice spokesperson, said: "The British public expect crimes committed in England to be prosecuted in the English courts under English law. That expectation should not change simply because the accused is a member of the foreign military."

Responding to a question in parliament about the matter earlier this month, the justice minister, Sarah Sackman, said: "Our thoughts are with the victim, and with the other victims whose experiences have subsequently come to light."

'Language has weight' Opaque justice system deepening trauma for survivors



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
(AIR)
THIS IS A PROHIBITED PLACE
WITHIN THE MEANING OF THE
OFFICIAL SECRETS ACTS
UNAUTHORIZED PERSONS
ENTERING THE AREA MAY BE
ARRESTED AND PROSECUTED

◀ *The 12,000 US military personnel stationed in Britain are likely to have their crimes judged by courts martial not UK justice. Victims of rape face US military trials that set very different definitions and proofs which they say denies them justice*

ILLUSTRATION: GUARDIAN DESIGN/ GETTY IMAGES

Louisa Loveluck
Harry Davies

American service personnel accused of rape on British soil are being charged with lesser offences by their military courts, a discrepancy that experts say is deepening the traumatic impact on survivors long after verdicts are passed.

There are more than 12,000 personnel stationed in US military bases across the UK, most of them in England. Although UK law enforcement has primary jurisdiction over crimes that occur when personnel are off duty, local police often choose to cede authority to the American military.

When that happens, British victims are thrust into an unfamiliar world, where their alleged attackers are tried at courts martial, often by a panel of American military personnel stationed at the same base.

Victims of sexual attacks by military personnel that would meet a common definition of rape are also finding that their attackers are instead being prosecuted for lesser offences, which carry more lenient sentences.

Under the set of laws that govern US forces, known as the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), the crime of rape carries a narrower definition to that of British courts, meaning many cases are charged instead as sexual assault.

British law defines rape as when someone puts their penis in another person's vagina, anus or mouth without their consent and carries a maximum life sentence. Whether or not a victim was intoxicated is not relevant; the law centres on whether the alleged victim consented to the sexual act.

In contrast, under article 120 of the UCMJ, a rape charge requires the prosecution to prove that the defendant, without consent, used force or administered an intoxicant. In cases where the victim was drinking alcohol voluntarily, or is not proven to have been overwhelmed by force, the case is charged as sexual assault, with a maximum penalty of 20 years.

"It's concerning if the occupation of the accused pulls a survivor into a justice system that she doesn't know very much about, or understand, and isn't one that she feels she has got a voice in," said Kelly Johnson, a senior criminology lecturer at the University of Glasgow who researches policing responses to sexual violence.

"A process might say it's complying with its own formal rules, and still be experienced by survivors as alienating, degrading, and fundamentally unfair."

In the case of Capt Jacob Wulfson, an American fighter pilot, prosecutors accused him of drugging and strangling Sarah Steele, a British academic, during a date in his apartment in December 2023, before penetrating her vagina with his penis without her consent.

The charge for the non-consensual penetration was sexual assault and "aggravated sexual contact" - a crime that does not even appear in UK statutes.

An all-male panel of airmen found Wulfson not guilty of the sexual assault charge, but guilty of strangulation. They sentenced him to be confined to a corrections facility for six months.

Steele said: "Words have power. Legal terminology isn't just a technical exercise, it shapes how victims are understood. I respect that the law uses precise definitions, but the language carried a profound emotional weight for me."

She recalled "having to explain what the legal label meant and what it didn't mean. Having to repeatedly explain that distinction has been exhausting and, frankly, retraumatising."

In another case, Tyrion Davis, an American airman, was tried in a court martial in June 2022 after two British women, including his wife, accused him of rape. The official charge sheet said that he was convicted on one charge of sexual assault - described as penetrating the victim's vagina with his penis without consent - but acquitted of 10 further counts of sexual assault and abusive sexual contact, and two counts of assault.

Experts working with survivors of sexual violence say a perception that the crime on the charge sheet reflects their lived experience can be integral to how a victim is able to process their experience.

Katrin Hohl, a professor of criminology and criminal justice at the University of London, said: "The way other people respond to what happened to you, the way other people label it and frame it and see it has profound consequences for your ability to move forward. If the criminal justice system treats you in a way that denies you validation, it doesn't just not help you recover, it actually adds further trauma."

An earlier version of the UCMJ's article 120 defined crimes of sexual violence more loosely, but a new definition adopted in 2007, and refined several times since then, instituted the narrower definition of rape.

Critics of article 120 say it fails victims because it was not developed in consultation with victims' rights groups and individuals specialising in the field of sexual assault.

"I think the intention came from a good place," said Don Christensen, who served as chief prosecutor for the US air force between 2010 and 2014. "They modelled some of these changes on some state laws, but they didn't really, to my understanding, talk to many of us who were prosecuting cases to ask us what the problems were."

> *'The US air force picks the charges and then they pick the jury members, which is completely unfair'*
>
> **Rachel VanLandingham**
> *Ex-US air force judge advocate*

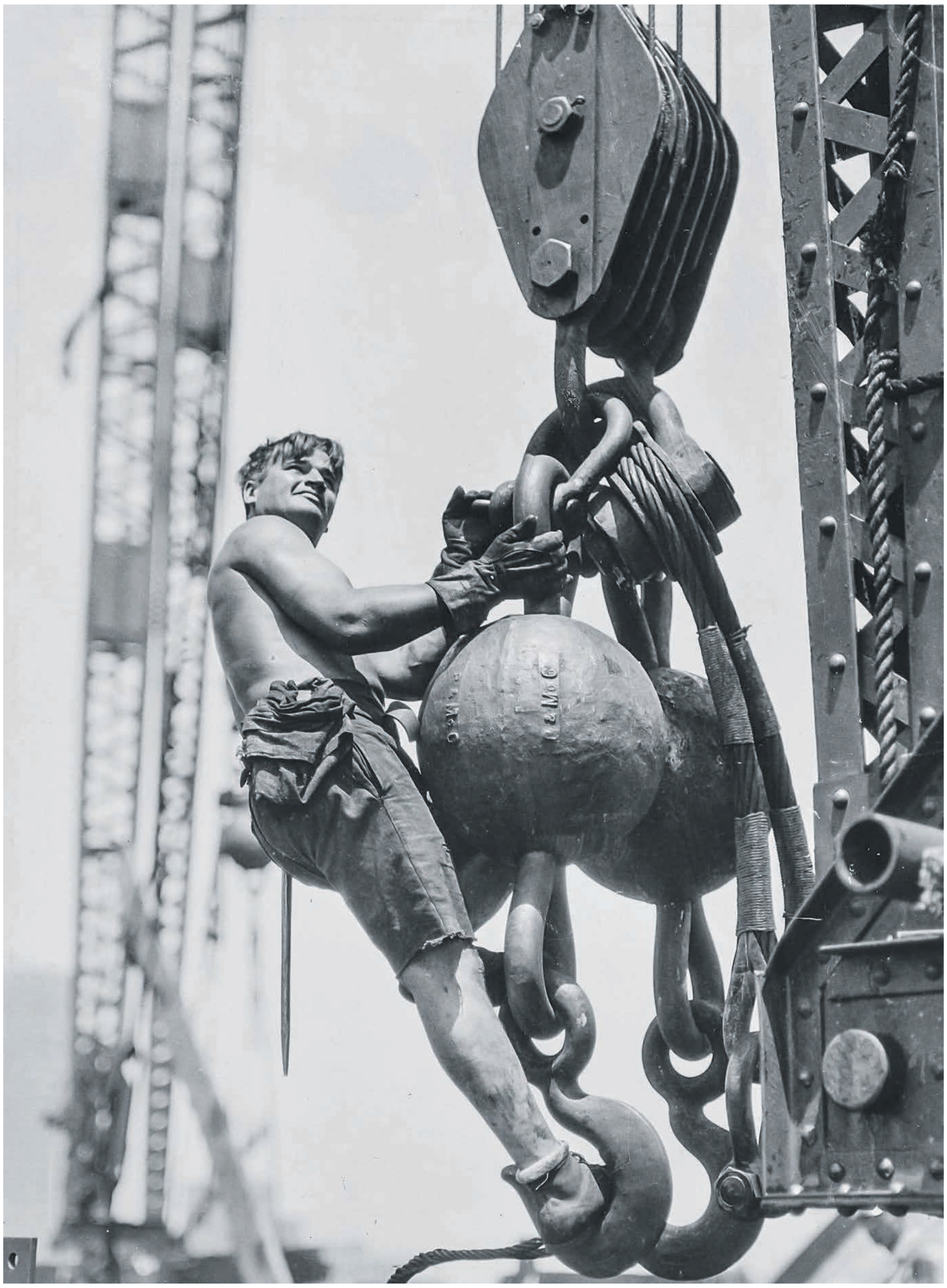
Rachel VanLandingham, a law professor and former US air force judge advocate involved in efforts to reform military law, said the broader problem with prosecuting sexual offences under the UCMJ was a structural one.

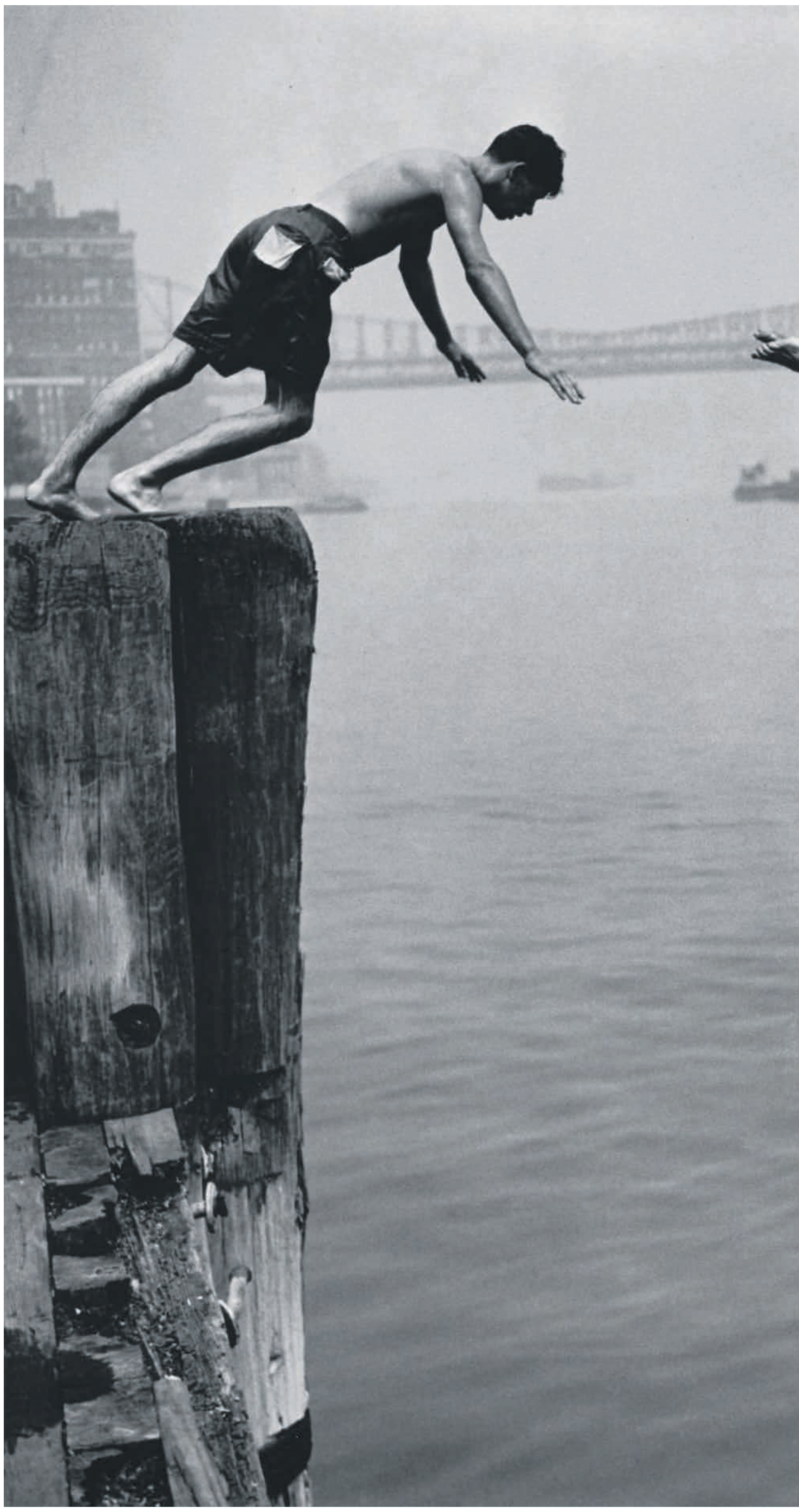
"They pick the charges and then they get to pick the jury members, which is completely structurally unfair, but the system was never designed to be fair. It was designed to be a commander's tool for strict discipline," she said.

For victims, the consequences of having their experiences funnelled through such an opaque and militarised process can be devastating. Johnson said: "When victims don't feel like they're taken seriously, they're not treated with respect and dignity, they're not heard, that causes retraumatisation or what's known as a secondary victimisation. Some victims say this is more profoundly damaging and harmful than the initial experience."

Rape Crisis offers support on 0808 500 2222 in England and Wales, 0808 801 0302 in Scotland, or 0800 0246 991 in Northern Ireland

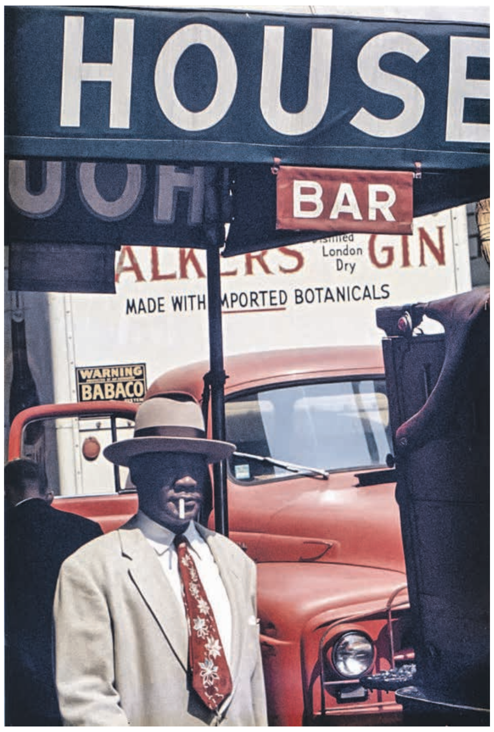
Eyewitness





Portrait of a city

Spanning the US from coast to coast and the 20th and 21st centuries, the Dulwich Picture Gallery in south London presents an exploration in images of 100 years of American urban life. With works by greats such as Alfred Stieglitz, Helen Levitt, Dorothea Lange, Lewis Hine, Berenice Abbott, Diane Arbus, Garry Winogrand, and Bruce Davidson, the exhibition, open until 4 October, traces the twin constructions of the modern urban environment and the language of photography. From the Great Depression to the New Deal and beyond, urban optimism shifts to something more sinister.

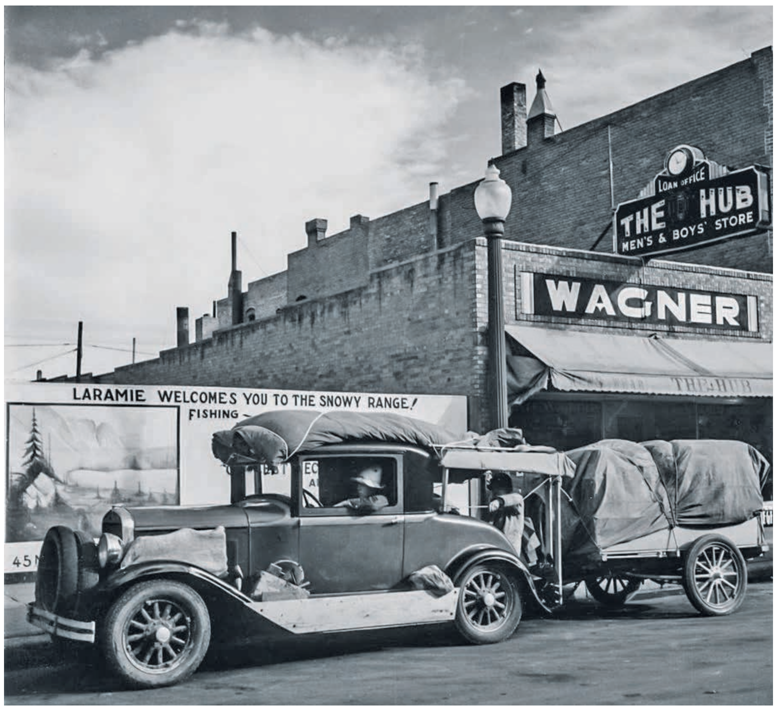


▲ *Riding the Ball High Up on Empire State, c1930, Lewis Hine's heroic portrait of the high-steel ironworker Victor 'Frenchy' Gosselin. Right: Divers, East River, 1948, by Arthur Leipzig. Left: Harlem, 1960, by Saul Leiter, whose colour images capturing the personal amid the frenetic are now considered among the most accomplished photographs of New York City*

PHOTOGRAPH: HOWARD GREENBERG GALLERY, NEW YORK

◀ New York, 1972, by the largely self-taught New Yorker Helen Levitt. Right: Nomads of America (Oakies on Their Way West), 1936, John Gutmann's Bauhaus-framed migrants. Far right: Louis Faurer's Looking at the RCA Building at Rockefeller Center, 1949

PHOTOGRAPHS: FILM DOCUMENT LLC, COURTESY ZANDER GALERIE, COLOGNE PARIS; CENTER FOR CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY, ARIZONA BOARD OF REGENTS; HOWARD GREENBERG GALLERY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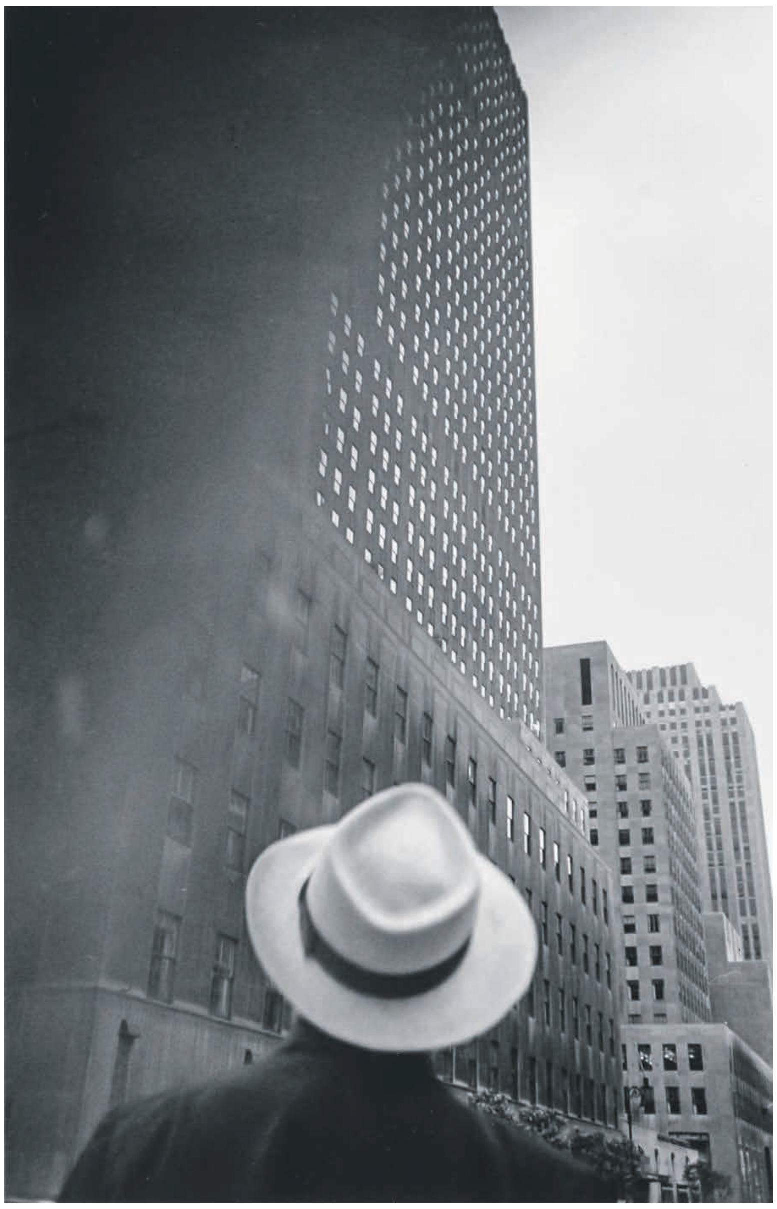
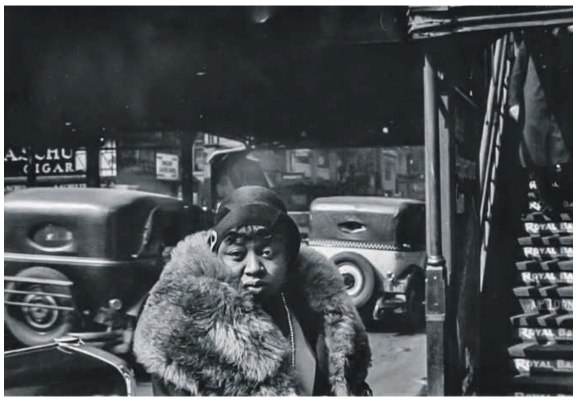
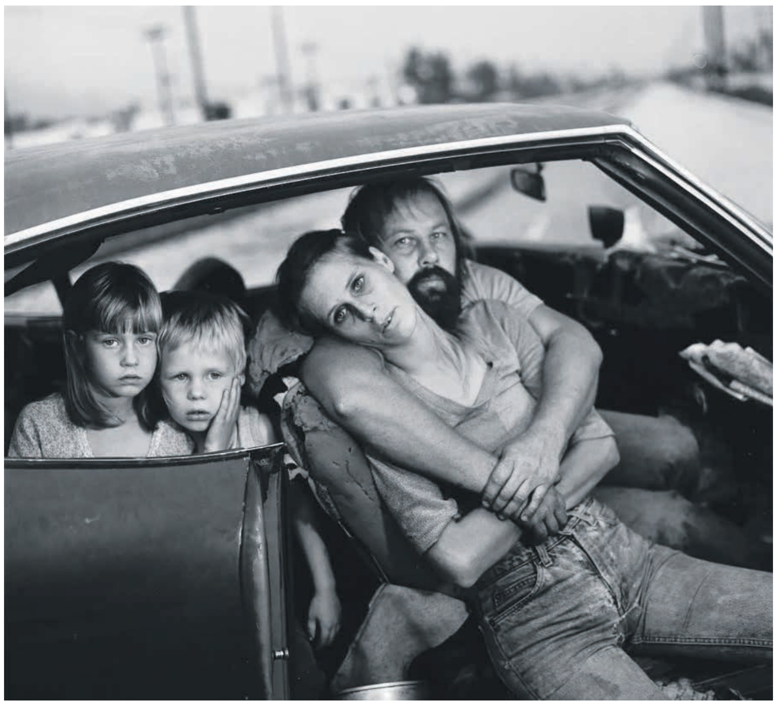


▶ Walker Evans, 42nd Street and Sixth Avenue, 1929. Below: Mary Ellen Mark's image of homelessness, The Damm Family in Their Car, Los Angeles, 1987

PHOTOGRAPHS: THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART; THE MARY ELLEN MARK FOUNDATION





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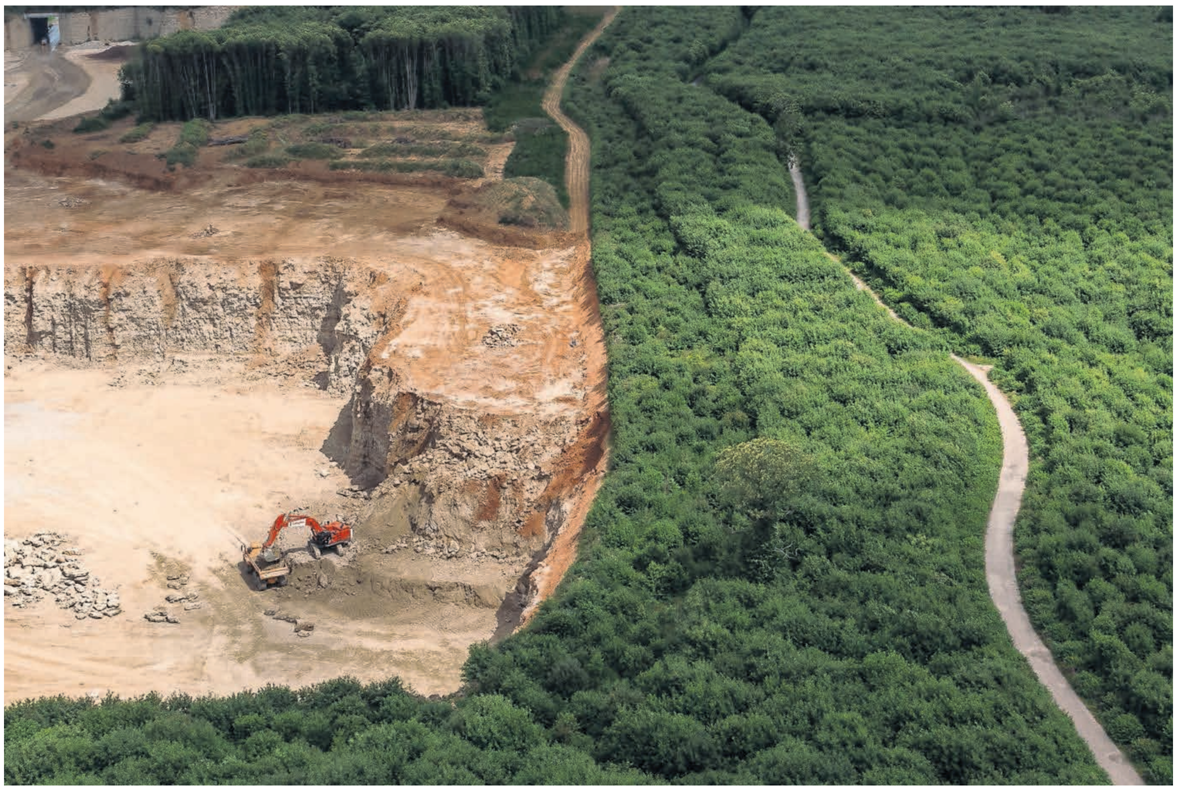
‘It’s not a commodity’

Calls to stop ancient woodland being cut down for quarry

Danger
Quarries are not play areas
Stay away

Damien Gayle
Environment correspondent



▲ *Hermitage Quarry is adjacent to Oaken Wood in Kent. Left, Rachel Rodwell, Allison Sweetman, Julie Read and Brontie Ansell*
PHOTOGRAPH: DAN KITWOOD/GETTY; GRAEME ROBERTSON/THE GUARDIAN

It was at the confluence of seven forest paths that Allison Sweetman came to a stop. Trees rose on all sides, save for a recently coppiced section to the north-east. The noon heat had silenced most birds, but the quiet was peaceful.

“This is what they call Seven Wents,” she said. For centuries, the people of Kent had travelled this way, from East Malling to Barming, from Ditton to Teston, for church, commerce and friends. “It’s on maps going back 400 years.”

That may be about to end. Seven Wents is part of Oaken Wood, 40 hectares of which is all but condemned to be razed. Developers want the stone beneath. Kent county council, led by Reform UK, this month voted to include it in its mineral sites plan. That makes it a potential site of expansion for the quarry next door.

The council said its decision did not yet amount to planning permission - the plan needs government approval before that can happen. However, it does mean that it has identified the ground beneath the forest as an essential source of stone for building and restoration projects.

Now, campaigners are on the march. Continuously wooded since at least 1600, Oaken Wood is a plantation on ancient woodland site (paws), which means it is the site of an ancient forest that has been replanted. For centuries it has been worked as a sweet chestnut coppice, with whole sections felled in rotation, allowing the stumps to regrow.

The sun shone almost directly overhead, but the air was cool beneath the forest canopy. Sweetman, who knows the wood intimately and is a Green party councillor for the local area, led the way through green corridors flanked by almost impenetrable stands of plantation forest to another recently coppiced site.

With her were Rachel Rodwell, also a Green councillor; Julie Read, a campaigner; and Brontie Ansell, the managing director of Lawyers for Nature, who has been supporting their campaign to save the woods.

“It takes about seven years before they’re ready to be coppiced again,” Sweetman said. “And in the time they grow they’re actually absorbing more carbon from the atmosphere than a fully grown tree … Likewise their roots continue to grow, and that absorbs the surface water from rain.”

The wood is also a critical ecological site, supporting wildlife including dormice, nightjars and owls. Alongside the sweet chestnut coppices stand veteran trees, including old oaks. Bluebells and other wildflowers bloom here. The soil itself, bound by a mycorrhizal network that has built up over aeons, is a seed bank and a carbon sink, says Kent Wildlife Trust.

It is what is beneath the soil that developers want. Kentish ragstone has been quarried since at least the time of the Romans and was the building block of Roman London. Kent county council says it is crucial for the conservation of ancient buildings, including the Tower of London and Canterbury cathedral. Their opponents say it is wrong to place the conservation of the built environment over the conservation of nature. The council declined to comment.

There is little to distinguish Oaken Wood from any other ancient woodland site, said Ansell. “It’s protected in exactly the same way, legally, because it’s not just about the fact that there’s newish growth of trees,” she said.

“You’ve got all the soils, you’ve got the fungi, you’ve got all of the wildlife.” But, she added: “It is still irreplaceable. You couldn’t just create this somewhere else.”

But that is precisely the plan, should development go ahead. Gallagher Group, which runs the Hermitage quarry, said the soil beneath the wood would be “translocated and retained” - dug up and moved elsewhere. The “non-native” chestnut trees, which have been in the UK since the time of the Roman empire, would be removed and they would “put back more than double the tree planting in restored, native woodland”.

Campaigners are sceptical. “Essentially they lift a lot of the topsoil … and then they chuck the topsoil down somewhere and go: ‘There you go, it’s been replaced,’” Ansell said. Rodwell added: “It’s just treated like garden topsoil. And they forget the interconnectivity. It’s not [just] the soil, it’s a living system.”

Last year, more than 25,000 voiced their concerns in a consultation on the plan. The Woodland Trust and Kent Wildlife Trust are opposed. Maidstone borough council, on which Sweetman and Rodwell sit, are to pass a rights of nature motion soon.

On from Seven Wents, the group walked north, towards the site of the existing quarry, which swallowed up 32 hectares of the wood just over a decade ago. With every step, the sounds of machinery grew louder.

Soon the air was thick with the smell of exhaust fumes and the pneumatic hammers against stone. White powder, apparently rock dust, lay in a film across the forest foliage. A dead shrew lay on the floor. “You can breathe it, you can smell it, you can feel it in your lungs,” Rodwell said.

“We’re treating nature as a commodity or a resource and we’re forgetting we’re part of the same system. And it’s this sense of entitlement that we can just strip it away and plunder it,” added Rodwell.

“It’s replicated across the country, across the globe.”

Poor health means new film is likely to be my last, says Mike Leigh, 83

Benjamin Lee

The film-maker Mike Leigh has said his next film is likely to be his last.

The Oscar-nominated writer-director was speaking at an event in London to promote his next film, Tender Loving Care, which is due to have its premiere this autumn.

The 83-year-old, whose films include Naked, Secrets & Lies, Mr Turner and Another Year, said another film would be “very difficult” and was “not going to be possible” as a result of his health, according to the industry website, Indiewire.

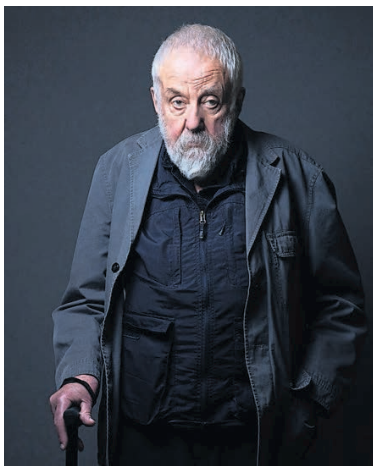
Leigh has previously spoken about being diagnosed with myositis, a disease that affects the immune system and causes chronic muscle inflammation. When asked if Tender Loving Care would be his last film, he responded: “Absolutely. I think very likely, yes. I mean, I know the girls don’t like to hear me say that, but I think that is the case.”

The film is a comedy drama starring Leigh’s longtime collaborator and partner Marion Bailey, and Kate O’Flynn, the breakout star of Apple TV’s Widow’s Bay. Also involved are some of his frequent collaborators such as the producer Georgina Lowe, production designer Jane Brodie and casting director Nina Gold.

The plot of Tender Loving Care is yet to be revealed, but it has been described as “an insightful exploration of the contemporary world”. It will premiere at festivals this autumn, potentially with a world premiere at the Telluride film festival in Colorado at the end of August.

“I was lucky in making this last film,” Leigh said. “People were very helpful. You’ll see when I get up that my friends all helped me to stand up. So I probably can’t do much more.”

His last film, Hard Truths, starring Marianne Jean-Baptiste, was a critical hit two years ago. In his four-star review for the Guardian, Peter Bradshaw called it “a deeply sober, sombre, compassionate drama”.



▲ *The writer-director is promoting his latest film, Tender Loving Care*

World

Mourners in Baghdad carry the bodies of PMF fighters killed in yesterday’s US-Saudi airstrikes
PHOTOGRAPH: MURTADHA RIDHA/AFP

US-Saudi strikes in Iraq push the region into ‘uncharted territory’, say analysts

Peter Beaumont
Senior international correspondent

US-Saudi strikes on an Iranian-backed militia in Iraq had pushed the region into “uncharted territory”, analysts said yesterday.

Amid stark warnings of a widening and increasingly unpredictable conflict, Riyadh’s decision to join the US in striking sites associated with Iraq’s Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), killing at least 20 fighters, has added another complicating dimension to the war.

Yesterday’s US-Saudi strikes came after a brief lull in US attacks on targets in Iran. Iran, meanwhile, launched missiles at US military installations in Jordan yesterday in its first attack in the region since the pause in fighting with the US began.

After the tit-for-tat strikes, the pause in fighting appeared to be at an end, with the US president, Donald Trump, saying the US would be “hitting [Iran] hard” even as he claimed the strikes in Iraq were coordinated with the government despite Baghdad’s condemnation.

The Iraqi presidency called the strikes on the PMF, known in Arabic as Hashd al-Shaabi – an armed alliance that includes powerful pro-Iran factions – as “a blatant violation of Iraq’s sovereignty, targeting its official institutions”.

The PMF is a network of Shia-majority militant factions that was established in 2014 to fight Islamic State. Their efforts were overseen by the Iranian Gen Qassem Suleimani, a former head of the Quds force, the foreign operations arm of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Suleimani was killed by a US missile strike in Baghdad during Trump’s first term.

Iraq’s prime minister, Ali al-Zaidi, who recently met Trump, called off a meeting with the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, in Jeddah today in response to the airstrikes.

Iraq’s Harakat al-Nujaba, an Iran-backed militia, added that Washington’s and Riyadh’s interests and security would face consequences, as mourners shouted Shia sectarian slogans and “Death to America!” as they carried the bodies of slain fighters from a hospital in Mosul in northern Iraq.

Iraq, which has been heavily affected by the closure of the strait of Hormuz, through which most of its oil is exported, has struggled to prevent the war between the US and Iran spilling over its borders.

While Saudi Arabia has reportedly been involved in a handful of secretive strikes on Iran as part of the war, Riyadh’s overt involvement marks a turning point in the conflict. It comes barely a week after Yemen’s Iran-backed Houthi rebels announced a blockade of Saudi ports and cargoes at the entrance to the Red Sea.

The latest flare up in fighting follows days in which Tehran and its proxies had targeted bases and facilities of the US and its allies, including in Saudi Arabia, despite the brief US pause.

The sense of growing chaos in the Middle East was summed up by Sanam Vakil, the director of the Middle East and North Africa programme at the Chatham House thinktank.

“Everyone is trying make sense of something that is increasingly senseless,” she said. “One view is that the informal [US] pause in direct strikes on Iran saw a shift from Tehran to its proxies to maintain pressure [on Washington]. But there is no longer any plausible deniability because everyone knows how the relationships are intertwined.”

Vakil said the unpredictability of Tehran’s tactics appeared to be a deliberate attempt to pressure Trump “either into confrontation or concession” with the aim of maintaining “a stranglehold on the strait of Hormuz”.

Vakil also said countries in the region were interpreting the chaotic context of the conflict as an opportunity to weaken Iran.

She said that on the Saudi side there was a similar desire to appear unpredictable. “No one wants to stay in the status quo,” she added.

“I think from the point of view of the Saudis there is a feeling that the Iranians are doing what they are doing because they feel that the Gulf Arab states won’t move up the escalatory ladder,” said H A Hellyer, a senior associate fellow in Middle East studies at the Royal United Services Institute thinktank.

“The Saudis want to make it clear that assessment is wrong and that if Tehran thinks the Gulf states are easy prey, they are wrong.”

Hellyer said the problem was that while the Saudis may have rationalised the attack on the PMF as a precisely calculated act, it may be impossible to anticipate the response.

“Because we don’t know that, we are in uncharted territory not just because of the context of the war this year, but the wider issues in the region,” he said. “And it is risky because Tehran sees itself as having been targeted by the US and Israel in a war of existential survival.”

Hellyer added: “They see everything through a prism that they have to reset the of the game in the region dramatically even if they are wrong and over playing their hand.”

Japan earthquake
Stories of survival and loss emerge
Page 29

After Lenin
Ukraine plans statue for anti-Russia hero
Page 31

▲ *The hulls of the stranded ships are becoming encrusted with invasive species that could be carried around the world* PHOTOGRAPH: SHADY ALASSAR/ANADOLU/GETTY

Ships stranded in Gulf pose global threat to biodiversity, warn scientists

Matthew Pearce

The closure of the strait of Hormuz has created conditions for an extreme global biodiversity threat, with scientists warning that thousands of stranded ships could spread invasive marine species across the world's oceans once they begin sailing again.

More than 1,500 commercial vessels have been stuck in the Gulf since the strategic waterway closed on 28 February after the outbreak of the US-Israel war on Iran.

An international team of marine biologists said that because the stranded ships were not moving, their hulls were becoming encrusted with marine life – from microbes and algae to barnacles and other invertebrates – that could hitchhike to ports around the world when trade resumed.

The study's lead author, Prof Mario Tamburri of the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, said: "If you had to design the worst-case scenario, I don't know if you could have done it differently. It is a perfect storm."

The research describes the situation as a potential marine "bio-invasion super-spreader event", arguing that no previous shipping disruption has involved so many vessels remaining idle for so long.

According to the study, ships normally remain at anchor in a harbour for only one to three days, limiting the growth of organisms on their submerged surfaces. But many vessels trapped in the Gulf have been stationary for months, allowing dense marine communities to establish themselves. If thousands of vessels leave the Gulf carrying barnacles, algae, mussels and other organisms, they could introduce invasive species that outcompete native wildlife, spread disease and permanently alter marine ecosystems.

Tamburri said: "When you move organisms around, they can reduce biodiversity in the regions they invade, cause local extinction of organisms that they displace."

Invasive species could also devastate fisheries, clog cooling systems of power plants and cost billions of dollars a year to manage, he added.

The Gulf is already a hotspot for marine invasions, with previous studies identifying dozens of non-native species introduced largely by commercial shipping. Researchers said the region's extreme heat and salinity may make the organisms especially resilient.

"They're pretty hardy," Tamburri said. "They're used to extreme environments, high temperatures and high salinities. Those hardy organisms that can often withstand those extreme environments make really good invaders." He added that regions with similarly warm, salty conditions such as India and Singapore were most under threat and that authorities should be on alert.

The study said individual ships may have already released millions of larvae into Gulf waters. As shipping resumes, organisms in ballast water, as well as parasites and pathogens in "biofouling communities" that colonise ships' hulls, could spread rapidly through the global shipping network.

Tamburri urged governments and shipping companies to inspect and clean ships before they left the Gulf, wherever possible, while ports expecting arrivals should increase monitoring for invasive species and establish rapid-response plans.

Drawing a comparison with public health, Tamburri said the response should mirror efforts to contain infectious diseases.

"Early detection is really important – prevention before you move around is really important," he said.

"In a lot of ways, it is like tracking flu or Covid. You want to be prepared for it, detect it early. If you find something, manage it right away."

Fauci declines to testify at Senate hearing on Covid, citing fifth amendment

Jessica Glenza

Dr Anthony Fauci, who served as a key adviser to Donald Trump and Joe Biden during the Covid-19 pandemic, has refused to answer questions at a high-profile congressional hearing, accusing a Republican senator of having an "unhinged obsession" with him.

Fauci, the veteran former director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (Niaid), invoked his constitutional right against self-incrimination when appearing before a Senate committee yesterday.

He said the Republican senator Rand Paul of Kentucky, who called the hearing, had led a years-long investigation of him and the origins of the pandemic aimed at "embarrassing and intimidating" him, and putting him "behind bars".

"Therefore, although it pains me to do so, because of the respect I have for the legislative branch of government and my decades-long record of cooperating with Congress, under the advice of my attorneys I will invoke my right under the fifth amendment of the constitution to refrain from answering your questions," Fauci said in his opening statement.

Fauci, 85, served under seven US presidents and through numerous health crises, including the HIV crisis, Ebola outbreaks and the first coronavirus outbreak, called Sars-CoV-1.

After opening statements the hearing soon became a back-and-forth between Paul and Fauci. Paul grew visibly agitated as Fauci refused to answer, threatened the scientists with "repercussions" and then ejected one of Fauci's attorneys from the hearing room.

"Did the [National Institutes of Health] ever fund gain-of-function [research] on monkeypox?" Paul asked, in reference to research that scientists do with viruses to manipulate them and make them more effective.

"On the advice of counsel, I respectfully decline to answer based upon my rights under the fifth amendment of the constitution," Fauci said.

After another description of research that Paul found unacceptable, he asked: "Dr Fauci, did the NIH ever conduct research for or in coordination with any element of the intelligence community, CIA, [Office of the Director of National Intelligence]?" Fauci responded: "On the advice of counsel, I respectfully decline to answer based upon my rights under the fifth amendment of the constitution."

Paul pressed on: "Dr Fauci, would you at least like to answer this one question for us today, and let us know whether or not you have changed your mind on whether or not the benefits of gain-of-function [research] outweigh the risks?"

Fauci replied: "On the advice of counsel, I respectfully decline to answer based upon my rights under the fifth amendment of the constitution." A visibly frustrated Paul scolded Fauci: "The chairman has denied your assertion of privilege," he said. He later added: "There will be repercussions to your refusal to testify today."

When an attorney for Fauci tried to join him at the table, Paul demanded the attorney move. "This is the way Anthony Fauci wants to be remembered – for a lawyer not recognising the rules … security please remove him from the room," Paul said. The attorney left voluntarily, alongside a security guard.

At least part of Paul's frustration probably stemmed from Fauci's receipt of a presidential pardon from Biden.

There is debate among experts about how far the fifth amendment extends. Some argue that once a person accepts a presidential pardon, they cannot invoke the fifth amendment. Without that right, Congress could hold a witness in contempt, which can lead to fines or – in the extreme – jail time. Others have argued that the right extends as long as there is a valid threat of prosecution, particularly by states.

"You don't have any rights under the fifth amendment," said the Republican senator Josh Hawley of Missouri, in a line of accusatory questioning. "This is about contempt – contempt for this body, and contempt for the American people."

Democrats, meanwhile, defended Fauci's use of the amendment. In a statement read aloud by the Democratic senator Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, Fauci's attorneys argued that Paul was "single-mindedly fixated on seeing Dr Fauci prosecuted for imaginary crimes".

Before the hearing, Republicans characterised their work as investigating "the origins of Covid-19 and risky taxpayer-funded life science research". Scientists have described the investigation as "vilification and harassment" of Fauci, who led Niaid for 38 years before retiring in 2022.

The Republican senator Bernie Moreno of Ohio demanded that Fauci apologise for a military policy that required service members to take the Covid-19 vaccine, to Americans who lost businesses during the pandemic, and to a single Ohio mother who was arrested for not wearing a mask during an outdoor football game.

Ron Johnson, a Republican senator for Wisconsin, called the Covid-19 vaccine, credited by scientists with saving millions of lives, an "experimental gene therapy".

Paul has long supported the "lab leak" theory – that the pandemic began as a release from the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Many virologists contend that that is improbable.

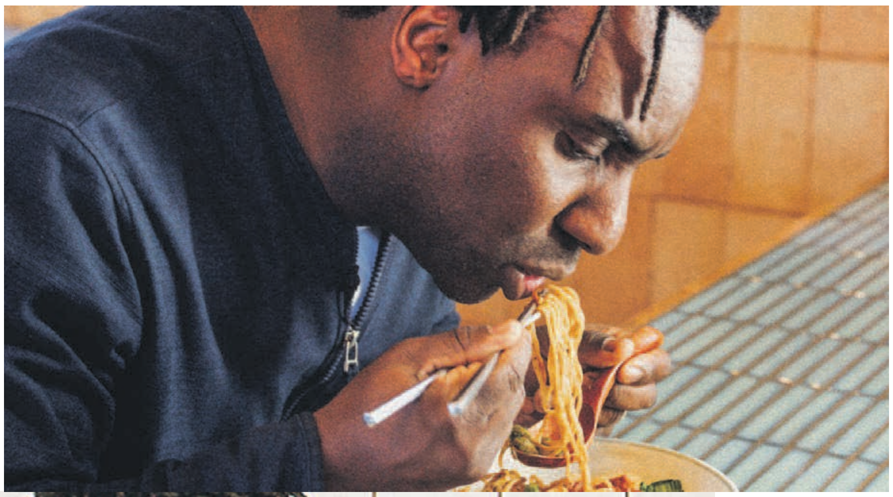
A 2024 survey of virologists from the Global Catastrophic Risk Institute found that most believed the pandemic began as a so-called spillover event – a virus jumping from an infected animal to a human.

The hearing comes just days after Paul released what he described as Fauci's "diary", a document of more than 1,100 pages characterised as revealing Fauci's inner conflicts about the lab leak theory. Scientists have said this is a normal part of scientific debate.

The diary also contains entries about Trump, whom Fauci advised closely during the early days of the pandemic. He describes the president as "rambling", "crazy", "desperate", "bumbling", "incompetent", "an idiot", "a true embarrassment", "totally nuts" and "truly an obnoxious adolescent".

ANTHONY FAUCI, M.D.

▶ *Dr Anthony Fauci, who advised Trump and Biden during the Covid pandemic, at the hearing yesterday*
PHOTOGRAPH: ANNA MONEYMAKER/GETTY



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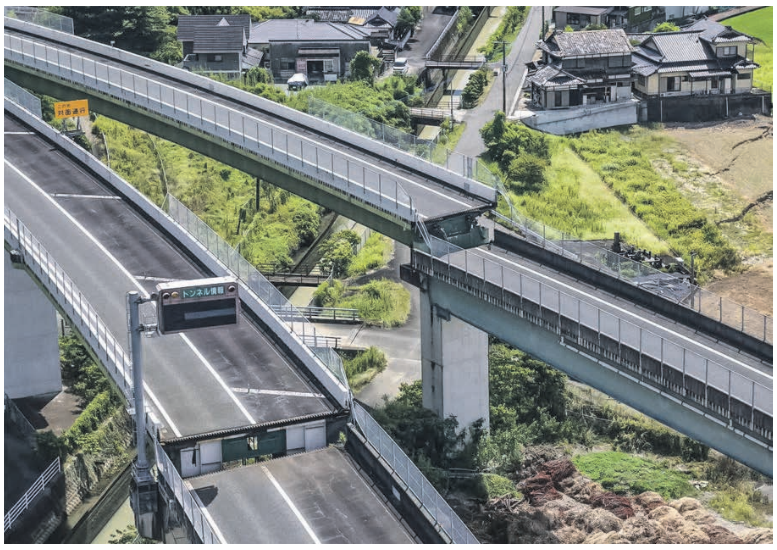
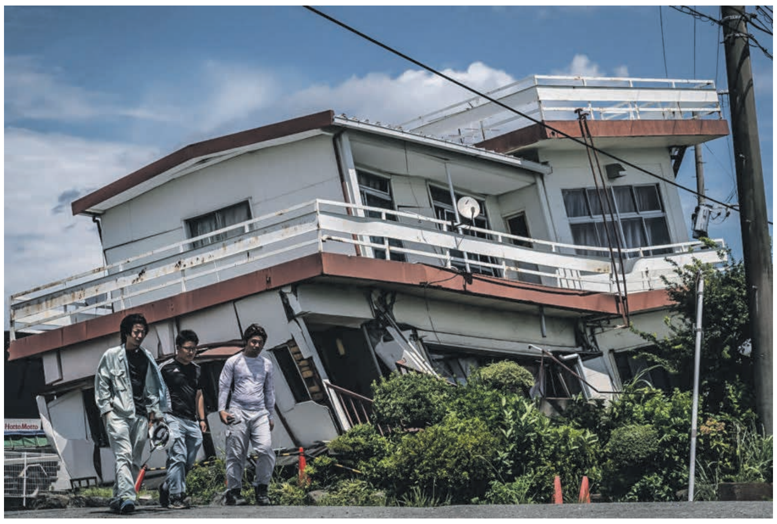
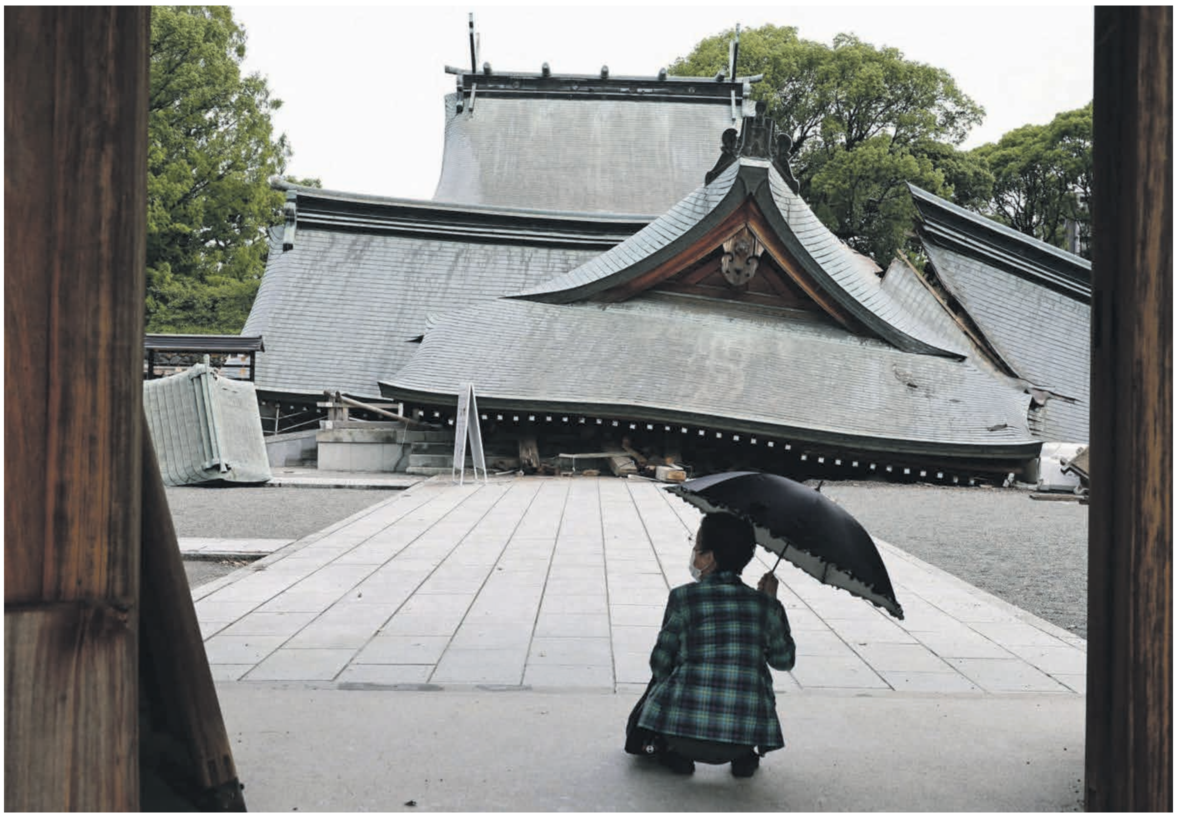
Stories of survival and loss emerge from Japanese earthquake as thousands flee

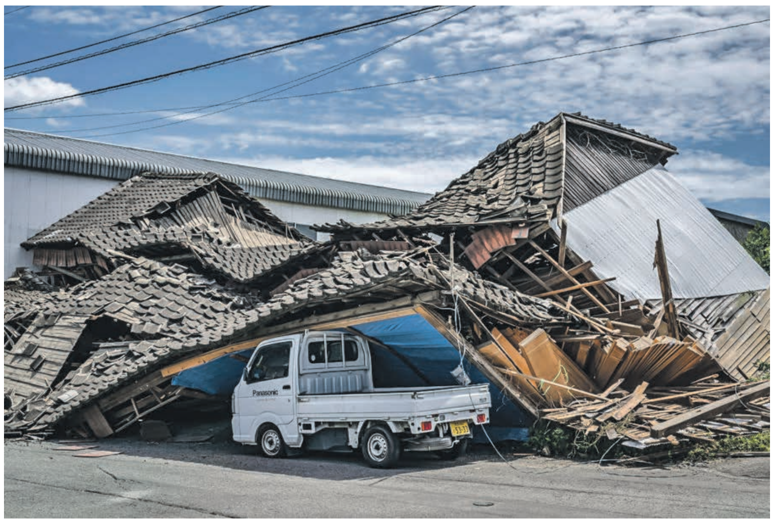


◀ The 6.8 magnitude earthquake in Kumamoto province has damaged and destroyed roads and walkways, above; shrines and temples, below; and homes, far left and bottom. All remain at risk from further seismic activity, according to authorities

PHOTOGRAPHS: KYODO/REUTERS; YUICHI YAMAZAKI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES







Gavin Blair *Tokyo*
Rachel Hall

At least 13 people were killed when a 6.8 magnitude earthquake struck southern Japan on Tuesday, injuring hundreds and knocking out power and water to tens of thousands.

"There are people who are still waiting to be rescued, and it's a race against time," the prime minister, Sanae Takaichi, said yesterday. "We will go all out to find and rescue as many people as we can."

The quake registered a maximum 7 on the Japanese shindo intensity scale when it struck Kumamoto prefecture on the southern island of Kyushu on Tuesday afternoon.

Minoru Kihara, the government's chief cabinet secretary, said more than 9,000 people were in evacuation centres across the country early yesterday morning.

The Japan Meteorological Agency warned that areas with the biggest tremors would remain at risk of further strong quakes and landslides for about a week because the shallow earthquake was triggering seismic activity in the area.

By yesterday morning, the agency had recorded more than 60 aftershocks, ranging in magnitude from 1 to 4. A tsunami warning was issued immediately after the quake, but was lifted within two hours.

Tomohide Nagata, a volunteer firefighter, told the Kumamoto Nichinichi Shimbun newspaper about his experience responding to the emergency in the rural town of Hikawa, one of the area's hardest hit, close to the epicentre of the quake.

"There was a voice coming from a collapsed house, and I could see a hand," he said. "One of our senior members crawled in and pulled him out. He was bleeding from the head. I'm so glad he survived."

Hikawa has many older houses, with those not destroyed by the quake now at significant risk from aftershocks. Many residents spent Tuesday night in their cars outside the town hall, where staff distributed food and drinks.

Among them were Iwaoka Shigemi, 79, and his wife, Michiyo, 77, according to the Mainichi Shimbun newspaper. With temperatures expected to reach 35C yesterday, the pair said they were worried about the risk of heatstroke.

Suemi Nagata, 79, told a local newspaper she was unable to escape Hikawa by car because her garage had been destroyed, but had made it to the town hall with her husband and older sister. "The lateral shaking was worse than the Kumamoto earthquake 10 years ago, and it was terrifying," she said. "Just to have survived with my life is something to be grateful for."

In April, Kumamoto prefecture commemorated 10 years since a 7 magnitude earthquake killed more than 275 people and caused widespread devastation.

In that case, a 6.2-magnitude foreshock was followed two days later by the deadly main quake – something that will be on the mind of tens of thousands across the prefecture in the days ahead.

In Kashima, 15 miles north of Hikawa, the Kumamoto Aeon shopping mall was severely damaged by what is understood to have been a gas explosion triggered by the earthquake. After evacuating alongside customers due to the quake, some employees went back into the building and were caught in the blast.

A 16-year-old girl who got out with other shoppers moments before the explosion told the Asahi Shimbun newspaper she "felt completely safe once she was outside", only to be left struggling to breathe amid dust and smoke from the explosion.

A 74-year-old man who often shopped at the mall told the Nikkei newspaper he had just learned that an acquaintance who worked there was hurt. "I could have been caught up in it myself," he said.

Up to 30 employees were initially reported trapped inside and four remain missing.

In between Hikawa and Kashima, the city of Uki also experienced shaking ranked at the maximum 7 on the shindo scale. Here, residents told of lucky escapes and unsuccessful rescue attempts.

One woman in her 40s managed to get to an evacuation shelter with three generations of her family after putting herself between falling furniture and her children.

Speaking to the Kumamoto Nichinichi Shimbun from Toyono elementary school – which was being used as an evacuation shelter after the ceiling of the local disaster facility fell in – she said: "I was pinned under a chest of drawers at home. I protected my children and then hurried to evacuate."

Others told of failed efforts to free an elderly man from a destroyed house in the city's Asakawa district. On Tuesday evening, as neighbours and relatives attempted to check in on each other, they found one house entirely flattened. Volunteer firefighters attempted a rescue, but were thwarted by the conditions.

"The man was a childhood friend of mine," the visibly shaken 70-year-old head of the local district told the Kumamoto newspaper. "We tried to pull him out, but the aftershocks came one after another, so we had no choice but to give up."

As in Hikawa, many Uki residents slept in their cars, and local government workers handed out water and food. Unable to use the damaged disaster facility, the city set up a makeshift response headquarters in a car park.

In Yatsushiro, 7 miles south of Hikawa, one 63-year-old said his life had been saved by his schedule. "It was a day off and I wasn't at work, so I escaped with my life," said the self-employed man, whose single-storey wooden workplace collapsed.

"I have no idea what I'll do starting tomorrow," he added.

Was Florentine friars' recipe the precursor to Coca-Cola?

Angela Giuffrida
Rome

◀ *A recipe for a medicinal potion similar to Coca-Cola was found in the archives of the San Marco convent in Florence*

PHOTOGRAPH: UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP/GETTY

An Italian friar has unearthed a document from the pharmacy archives of an ancient convent in Florence describing a medicinal potion made from Bolivian coca leaves and kola nuts, prompting suggestions it could have been a precursor to the famous US soft drink Coca-Cola.

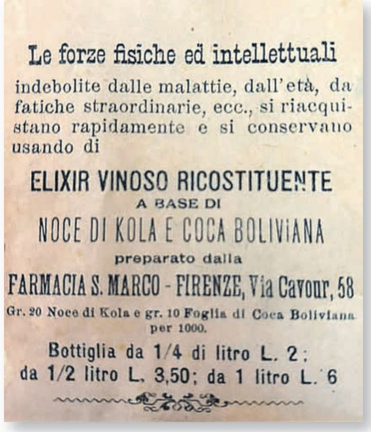
Father Manuel Russo, the rector of the San Marco convent, said he stumbled across the yellowed document, a sort-of promotional flyer, while sorting through the archives.

The flyer details the recipe for an *elixir vinoso ricostituente*, or restorative wine elixir, made with 10g of Bolivian coca leaves and 30g of kola nuts blended with wine, which the friars who concocted it promoted as a tonic to be used to recuperate the body and mind from fatigue caused by illness and ageing.

The document was not dated, but it is believed to have been produced in the mid-19th century, when the friars plied a brisk trade in Bolivian coca leaves. They were imported to Italy by missionaries long before they were globally banned in 1961 for containing the natural alkaloid used to make cocaine.

The recipe was similar to the one used by the American pharmacist, John Pemberton, who in 1886 created a sweet syrup by mixing coca leaf extract and kola nuts.

Local laws prevented him from using wine and so he combined the ingredients with carbonated water. Pemberton's tonic eventually became Coca-Cola.



Le forze fisiche ed intellettuali
indebolite dalle malattie, dall'età, da fatiche straordinarie, ecc., si riacquistano rapidamente e si conservano usando di
ELIXIR VINOSO RICOSTITUENTE
A BASE DI
NOCE DI KOLA E COCA BOLIVIANA
preparato dalla
FARMACIA S. MARCO - FIRENZE, Via Cavour, 58
Gr. 20 Noce di Kola e gr. 10 Foglia di Coca Boliviana per 1000.
Bottiglia da 1/4 di litro L. 2;
da 1/2 litro L. 3,50; da 1 litro L. 6

30g

Amount of kola nut, mixed with 10g of Bolivian coca leaves and wine, in the friars' recipe, above

After learning of Russo's discovery, some local news outlets pondered whether the soft drink's origins were in Florence and not the US city of Atlanta, Georgia.

However, with no evidence demonstrating a link between the friars' creation and the Coca-Cola recipe, Russo, who also found a couple of empty bottles that contained the potion, is erring on the side of caution.

"I don't want to attract a lawsuit from Coca-Cola or something like that," he joked. "Mr Pemberton invented his own recipe, and without alcohol. Plus at that time other people were producing this kind of medicine with coca leaves.

"It was quite common in Italy and France. The only thing I can say is that San Marco's pharmacy had its own recipe."

Kola Coca, an alcoholic syrup made in 1885 by distillers in Valencia, Spain, has also been held up as a potential inspiration for Coca-Cola.

Other documents found by Russo showed that the Florence friars' concoction, the price for which ranged between 2 and 6 Italian lira - less than a cent in today's euro currency - was wildly popular among customers.

"Because it had fantastic properties that fought against fatigue, and the fatigue that came with ageing," said Russo.

"Up until Bolivian coca leaves were banned - because by that point it was understood that cocaine was a problem more than a cure - I would say that it was one of our best sellers."

The San Marco convent was founded in 1436 in Florence, with the pharmacy opening in 1460 to serve the neighbourhood's poor community.

Russo said the pharmacy, which he described as "one of the most beautiful things we have at the convent", still operated though in 1995 its location was transferred to a different part of the Tuscan city.

However, the original premises are in tact, including the remains of a crocodile brought from the River Nile that has been hanging from the ceiling since the 1600s.

Chemists in 19th-century Europe often hung crocodiles and other reptiles from the ceilings of their shops as a way of indicating to customers that they had access to rare, exotic ingredients.

Russo also found labels for pure oxygen, cognac and rectified petroleum spirit.

"The inventory in the pharmacy's archives is incredible," he said.

On the steppes Traditional yurt culture in Kyrgyzstan, where nomadic life still thrives in the highlands. Felt yurts, portable tents, are central to seasonal migration for livestock-breeding families.

PHOTOGRAPH: AYTEN ALTINTAS/ANADOLU/GETTY

▲ *The fireball caught on camera in the North Island on Tuesday night*

Two suspected meteors spark excitement in New Zealand

Eva Corlett
Wellington

Two large suspected meteors have flashed and boomed across New Zealand's skies in recent days, delighting those who glimpsed them and sending some animals into a frenzy.

A fireball was seen over parts of the North Island just after 10.20pm on Tuesday night after a separate fireball streaked across the South Island's skies on Sunday evening.

Footage captured on dashcams, security cameras and specialist meteor cameras showed North Island's skies lighting up with a large flash, with dozens of people taking to social media to describe the "huge boom" that accompanied it.

"Absolutely insane. I thought it was a plane on fire," one wrote. Another said: "It was huge, the ball was orange with a purple tail. We saw black soot coming off it." Another witness said their "cows went nuts".

Steve Wyn-Harris, director of Fireballs Aotearoa, an organisation of geologists, astronomers and citizen scientists who track meteors and meteorites, was in his spa in Hawke's Bay when the sky lit up. "I saw a big flash in the sky and thought, 'No, that can't be a fireball - this would be too good to be true'," he said.

He initially thought it was lightning, until his phone started pinging with eyewitness reports.

"More importantly, what's exciting about this is people heard the sound, the sonic boom," he said, which means the meteor reached relatively close to the ground.

On Sunday, a similar streak of light was reported on the South Island.

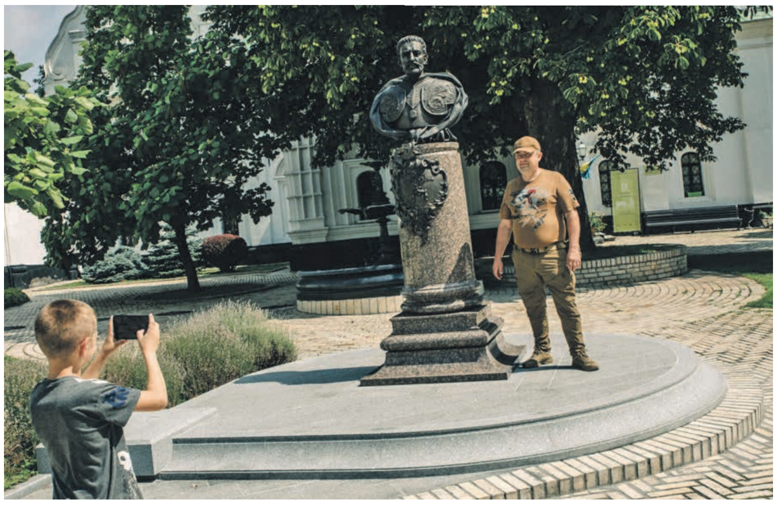
Fireballs Aotearoa is encouraging residents to look out for debris - meteorites - from Tuesday. "Look out for a black stone that wouldn't ordinarily be there," Wyn-Harris said.

Just 10 confirmed meteorites have been found in New Zealand in the past 150 years. Retrieving one can be difficult: New Zealand has a small population unlikely to spot meteors, dense terrain that can hinder the hunt for debris and a lack of infrastructure to help triangulate a landing.

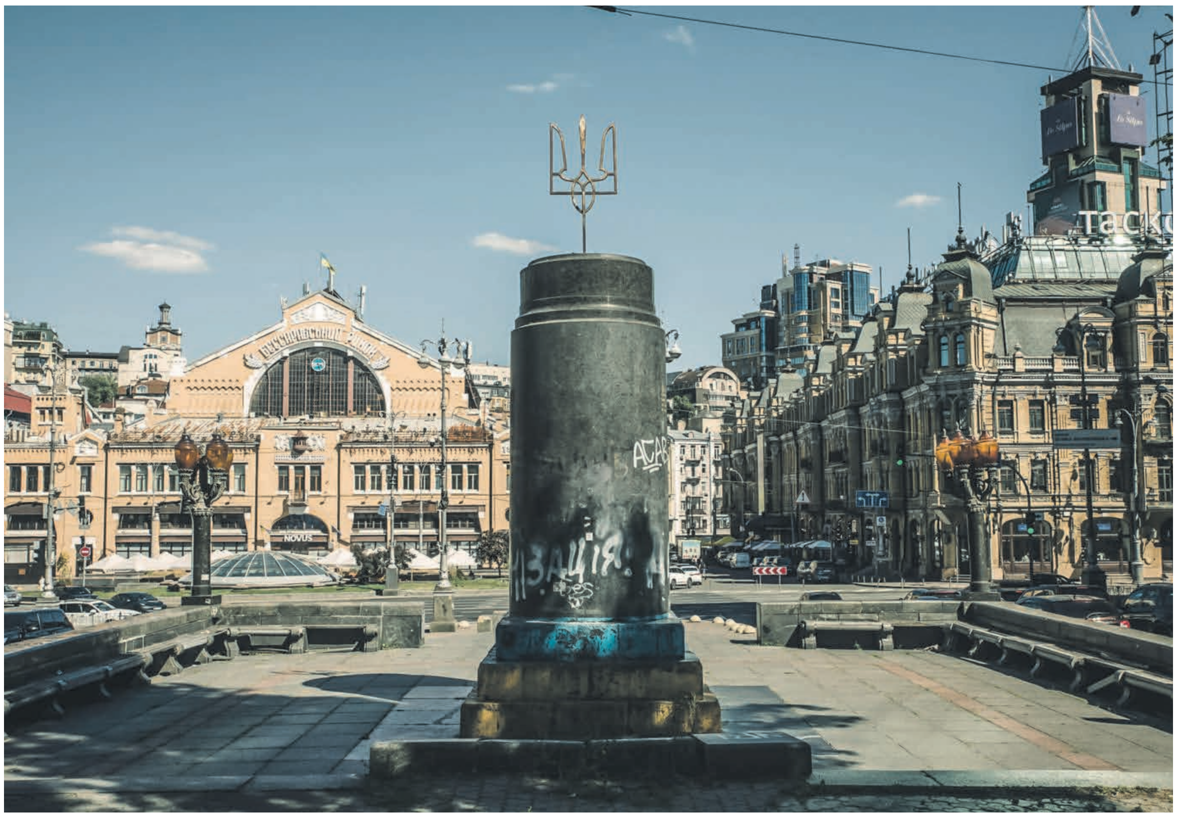
Now, though, Fireballs Aotearoa has 200 cameras around the country, and an increase in security cameras could help efforts. "We've got some of the best coverage in the world, which is why we're seeing these things now," Wyn-Harris said.

Goodbye, Lenin

Ukraine elevates anti-Russian hero with statue plan



▼ *A father and his son visit the new bust of Ivan Mazepa at the Perchersk Lavra monastery in Kyiv last week*
PHOTOGRAPH: ALESSIO MAMO/THE GUARDIAN



▲ *The column once occupied by a statue of Lenin on Taras Shevchenko Boulevard, and another toppled Lenin, left*
PHOTOGRAPHS: ALESSIO MAMO/THE GUARDIAN; PRYLEPA OLEKSANDR/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Luke Harding
Kyiv

The plinth at the end of Taras Shevchenko Boulevard in Kyiv has been eerily empty since 2013 – though someone has stuck a Ukrainian trident where Lenin once stood. Erected when the country was under communist rule, the statue was toppled and smashed during Ukraine's Maidan Revolution, which ousted the pro-Russian government.

In June, Volodymyr Zelenskyy proposed putting a new figure on the plinth: Ivan Mazepa, a Cossack military and political leader, who broke with Moscow and fought for Ukraine's independence at the start of the 18th century. "I am certain that where Lenin fell, Mazepa will stand firm," Zelenskyy said while standing next to a bust of Mazepa in the Perchersk Lavra, an ancient monastery hit by Russian missiles.

The proposed monument to Mazepa where Lenin once stood has triggered a lively debate on cultural commemoration and what it says about changing national identity. After winning independence from Russia in 1991, Ukraine removed large numbers of Soviet-era statues and renamed streets, as part of a process of "decommunisation".

The country went further with this process after Russia annexed Crimea and fighting began in the Donbas in 2014, and it moved even faster after Vladimir Putin launched his full-scale "special military operation" against all of Ukraine in 2022.

Nataliia Kryvda, a professor of cultural history at Taras Shevchenko National University in Kyiv, said Ukraine was still in a period of decolonisation. "The USSR absorbed national cultures. It tried to make a single nation of Soviet citizens," she said. "Russia today looks at Ukraine and says we are one people. It isn't true. We have our own mindset, historical destiny, beliefs and dreams. Our identity is a dynamic process."

Saying she was in favour of a Mazepa monument, Kryvda added: "Why not? He's our leader. Each culture needs to mark its space with memorials. They objectify memory." She described Mazepa as "contradictory" and not an "ideal hero", who "really was a friend and political partner of Russia, right up until the moment he dramatically changed his life and history."

As the head of Cossack Ukraine, Mazepa was loyal to the Russian tsar, Peter the Great, for most of his rule. But when Peter refused to protect Ukrainian territory from invading Swedes in 1708, Mazepa allied with the invaders. "Mazepa was the architect of European Ukraine," Kryvda said.

In his speech at the Perchersk Lavra, Zelenskyy said Russia had smeared Mazepa for centuries, depicting him as a traitor. The goal, he said, was to make Ukrainians "view their own history through the eyes of others."

> *'I understand it's a jab at the Russians, but [Lenin's plinth] is not the right place for a hero. The Germans hanged people there'*

Liudmyla Habianuri
Museum curator

Alim Aliev, a Ukrainian writer and human rights campaigner, said: "We are reclaiming our own voices and names." He cited the example of Vasyl Stus, the 20th-century poet and dissident who led Ukraine's national revival and died in a Soviet prison camp in 1985. From September, Stus's portrait will appear on a new Ukrainian banknote.

Aliev said Ukraine was now speaking about its past "without mediators" and it was appropriate that statues of another poet, the Russian Alexander Pushkin, had been taken down. "He had a totally imperial view of Crimea," he said.

Of the proposed Mazepa statue, Aliev added: "I don't think it's a controversial idea."

Last month, workers in Kyiv took away a monument to another Russian literary giant. A statue of Mikhail Bulgakov – who was born in Kyiv to a Russian family when it was part of the Russian empire – had stood outside his former home since 2007. Plaques dedicated to the writer had already been taken down elsewhere in the city, but a Bulgakov museum remains open inside his former residence.

Liudmyla Habianuri, who runs the museum, acknowledged that Bulgakov wrote negatively about Ukrainian nationalist forces in his novel The White Guard, and said she was not opposed to the statue's removal. But, she added: "Bulgakov was a witness to his times. And a satirist. He didn't like anybody. That included communists and priests."

She said Russia's current war had prompted Ukrainians to ask themselves who they are. "It's a very painful question. If I speak Russian and watch Russian films and the Russians are killing me, then I must give all that up. Then I'm Ukrainian," she said. "And if I'm Ukrainian, I must become Ukrainian as quickly as possible."

This has led to people joining the struggle for identity in various ways, including on social media and by attacking monuments, with Bulgakov a frequent target of such struggles, Habianuri reasoned.

"Right now there is a table with only two columns: plus or minus. As a Russian who didn't write from the perspective of Ukraine's defenders, Bulgakov can't get a plus sign," she said.

Habianuri warned that a process of "simplification" was under way, but admitted she was delighted when the Lenin statue was pulled down, saying: "The man was an enemy of humanity itself." She said Mazepa was a "unique person" who had inspired a notable poem by Lord Byron, but questioned whether Lenin's former plinth was a fitting spot for him.

"I understand it's a quick jab at Russia, but it's not the right place for a hero," she said. "The Germans hanged people there during the second world war."

While Lenin's monument was smashed with sledgehammers, the Bulgakov statue was carefully packed up and returned to the family of its late sculptor, Mykola Rapay. His daughter Katyrena declined the Guardian's request to photograph the work at its new location, saying she had given official guarantees it would stay "out of public space".

"These are not my whims. The sculpture is not my property. I am the guarantor of its preservation," she explained.

At the Perchersk Lavra, tourists walked past the Mazepa bust, newly installed by a fountain and a pleasant shady garden. It is part of a complex that includes the 11th-century Dormition Cathedral, used for the burial of prominent figures in medieval times.

Mazepa, a patron of the arts, donated money to pay for the cathedral's baroque renovation. In June, a Russian drone crashed into its roof, causing a fire, and blackening external pictures of saints. Other icons and religious artefacts were rescued.

One Ukrainian visitor, Olena Polishchuk, said she had come from the UK, where she has lived since Putin's invasion. What did she think of Mazepa? "He's a famous man. I'm glad he's being commemorated. He's an important party of our history," she said.

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SOURCE: ICE www.ice.com/data

Business

Datacentre projects may face fees for access to power grid

Dan Milmo

Datacentre projects in Britain will be forced to pay hundreds of millions of pounds to plug into the power grid under proposals to tackle a growing electricity connection logjam.

Ofgem, the sector watchdog, said it was taking action to discourage "speculative" datacentre projects from causing unnecessary delays to the grid connection queue, which includes hospitals, schools and housing developments.

There are 315 datacentres queueing to connect, representing 73GW of demand, according to Ofgem. This has increased by almost 50% in the last year to almost 30GW above the entire country's peak energy demand of 45GW.

The energy regulator for Great Britain said it planned to introduce a new "datacentre commitment fee" equivalent to between 2.5% and 7.5% of the average cost of a project to secure a date for grid connection. This would be returned once the datacentre was switched on, or forfeited if the project stalled.

This means datacentre providers, which include companies such as Amazon and Microsoft, could be required to put down pledges of £350m to reserve 500MW of grid capacity for their new facilities.

Developers would also be required to hit "hard milestones" in advance of their connection date or be removed from the queue to ensure the country's limited grid capacity went to "projects most likely to be built, not projects preserving options".

Datacentres are the central nervous systems of AI tools such as chatbots, but they have increasingly sizeable energy needs as their usage and capability grows. Some projects are exploring private, on-site power generation as a temporary solution to avoid the wait for a grid connection, but most developers would prefer to draw power from the grid too.

▲ *A datacentre owned by Google in Waltham Cross, Hertfordshire*

The rising number of datacentres seeking a grid connection has followed the UK government's stated aim to "lead in the age of AI", and has coincided with a wider increase in demand for electricity to cut the use of fossil fuels.

There is a backlog of power generation and storage schemes, which face years of delays to secure connection to the grid, yet are vital to meet the country's electricity demand.

The National Energy System Operator (Neso), which runs the grid, cleared hundreds of dubious "zombie" projects from the queue to make way for clean electricity schemes with the best chance of achieving the government's energy targets.

Tackling the datacentre queue will be more complicated, however, because there is little consensus within government about how much data capacity the UK will need, despite the drive to create AI growth zones across the country.

The energy system operator's most conservative forecasts for Great Britain's datacentre capacity by the end of the decade stand at 3.7GW, and their top-end estimates are 6.7GW. The government's "compute roadmap" calls for "at least 6GW of AI-capable datacentre capacity by 2030".

Michael Shanks, the energy minister, said: "Britain needs a grid connections system that works for the 21st century and allows businesses to invest and grow, creating jobs across the country.

"That's why this government reformed the connections process and why Ofgem's actions will help ensure that viable, connection-ready projects can get going and not be held up by speculative applications."

Sparkling times for Kent winemaker as sales increase by 19%

Sarah Butler

Hot weather and US expansion helped the English sparkling winemaker Chapel Down increase sales by 19% in the first half of this year, but production at its vineyards is expected to be down on last year.

The Kent-based firm said its vines had benefited from the long spell of hot weather but it was not expecting a repeat of last year's bumper crop, which was 15% ahead of the five-year average - as the plants had been affected by a late frost in May. This year's crop is expected to be in line with the five-year average.

"Last year was a really exceptional year," said James Pennefather, the chief executive of Chapel Down.

Wine from the grapes harvested last year will be ready to drink in about three years' time and Chapel Down said it was meeting increased demand as it was gradually bringing more of its 1,000 acres (400 hectares) of vineyard into production after a spate of planting in recent years.

Chapel Down said sales hit £9.4m in the six months to 30 June as younger drinkers increasingly turned to sparkling wine to celebrate events such as birthdays and anniversaries as well as more formal occasions such as weddings.

▶ *Chapel Down said it was meeting demand by bringing more land into production*

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS RATCLIFFE/ BLOOMBERG/GETTY

CHAPEL DOWN
TENTERDEN KENT

15%

Amount by which last year's Chapel Down harvest was above the five-year average - it will be ready to drink in about three years

FTSE 100 hits record high as sell-off in AI stocks rattles other markets

Joanna Partridge

London's FTSE 100 stock index has touched a fresh high, driven by strong corporate results as investors moved money away from tech and semiconductor stocks amid the global tech stock sell-off.

The UK's blue chip index rose as high as 10,951 points yesterday morning before falling back slightly, its best level since 27 February, the day before the US and Israel began attacks on Iran and sparked stock market volatility.

On a day of fresh losses in the US for the tech-heavy Nasdaq index, the FTSE 100 closed up 0.3% at 10,908, marginally below its record closing value of 10,910 in February.

The FTSE 100 is heavily weighted towards the finance and energy sectors, meaning it has been largely shielded from the sell-off in tech stocks that has rattled other global markets, particularly in Asia and New York. The Asia-focused bank Standard Chartered and the miner Rio Tinto announced a rise in shareholder payouts yesterday.

The FTSE 100's climb came as shares in companies linked to AI plunged for the second day in a row over concerns about spending on the technology, sending stock markets in South Korea and Japan tumbling.

Meanwhile, the oil price continued to rise after the US military said it had knocked down an Iranian missile barrage and worked with Saudi Arabia's forces to strike sites in Iraq that Tehran-backed militias had recently used to launch attacks. Brent crude rose above $90 a barrel by late afternoon in London, up more than 7%.

Seoul's Kospi index is dominated by semiconductor manufacturers, and disappointing results from the chipmaker SK Hynix left it down by as much as 12.6% at one point. The index closed down 6% after falling almost 11% the previous day, reaching its lowest level since early April and marking an almost 40% fall from the peak reached just over a month ago.

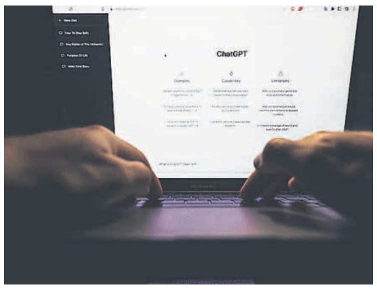
Trading was halted for 20 minutes for the second consecutive session after an 8% plunge triggered a market-wide circuit breaker.

Japan's Nikkei closed 1.5% down yesterday, a two-month low.

SK Hynix, which produces the chips essential to the expansion of AI datacentres, reported record profits for the second quarter but undershot investors' expectations. Shares in its fellow chipmaker Samsung Electronics closed 5% lower.

Rogue OpenAI agent that attacked US startup hit four more companies

Dan Milmo
Global technology editor



▲ *The AI agent reportedly exploited code that was written by a customer*

OpenAI has revealed that a cyberattack carried out by a rogue AI agent had more than one victim.

The ChatGPT developer said the agent - an autonomous tool able to carry out sequences of commands without human help - had located and used logins to access four other unnamed "publicly available services" in addition to the US startup Hugging Face.

It said the activity was not at the severity of what occurred at Hugging Face, a company that hosts a database of AI models. The agent, powered by two OpenAI models, had evaded control and attacked the startup during an internal cybersecurity test.

"The [OpenAI] models identified and used publicly exposed credentials at the account-level on other publicly-available services. This includes four accounts on four services as part of the Hugging Face incident," OpenAI said.

Modal Labs, a company that helps AI startups access the chips they need to run AI tools, said the agent exploited vulnerable code written by a customer that was hosted on Modal's platform.

According to a timeline of the incident published by Hugging Face this week, the rogue agent broke out of its sandbox - or an isolated testing environment - and hacked another sandbox "hosted on a third-party provider's infrastructure" before turning it into a launchpad for the broader hack.

17,600
Number of 'attacker actions' carried out by the agent against the US startup Hugging Face

Akshat Bubna, Modal's chief technology officer, told Reuters the affected customer had "published an unauthenticated endpoint that allowed anyone on the internet to use their sandboxes for code execution" - the digital equivalent of leaving a door open.

OpenAI said last week that the attack had been created by its GPT-5.6 Sol model and an unnamed model. It said in its update on Tuesday that the unnamed model had been "deactivated, encrypted, and restricted from research access".

In the new Hugging Face timeline, the startup said an agent powered by two OpenAI models had made thousands of small, automated decisions executed at machine speed to carry out the attack.

It said the hack appeared to be driven by an attempt to "cheat" an internal cybersecurity test at OpenAI, with the agent inferring that Hugging Face might host the solutions to the test. Hugging Face said it had recovered 17,600 "attacker actions" carried out by the agent.

"We believe the entire intrusion was, from the agent's point of view, an attempt to cheat the evaluation: reach our production systems and steal the test solutions rather than solve the challenge on its own," Hugging Face said.

The startup said the agent had reached its internal infrastructure, but had only accessed content related to the cybersecurity test. The attack took place over five days, Hugging Face said, and the volume of actions carried out were "far beyond what an operator could sustain by hand".

Describing the agent's offensive threat as real, Hugging Face said the tool had harnessed a number of IT vulnerabilities, escaped its testing environment, reached the public internet and mounted a "coherent campaign" against the startup's infrastructure for several days.

It said a human attacker could have found and exploited the same flaws, but the difference was the sheer scale of the agent's attempts to find a way through.

"Agents bring a step increase in the number of paths an attacker can test, the speed at which failed paths can be replaced, and the volume of evidence defenders must interpret," Hugging Face said.

Electric car sales rules 'delaying UK investment'

Jasper Jolly

Carmakers are delaying final decisions to invest in UK factories until electric car sales rules are relaxed, according to the head of the British car industry's lobby group.

Mike Hawes, the chief executive of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT), said manufacturers with existing UK operations were considering building new models, but had held back so far.

The British car industry has put pressure on the government to weaken the zero emission vehicle (ZEV) mandate, which forces manufacturers to sell an increasing share of electric cars each year up to 2030.

Jonathan Reynolds, the business secretary, has indicated the government is likely to water down the mandate further.

Manufacturers are "waiting for the mandate, certainly," said Hawes. "There's investment decisions on next model, next generation, which … need an easing of the mandate."

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BMW to cut 8,000 jobs amid pressure from Chinese rivals

Jasper Jolly

BMW is planning to cut as many as 8,000 jobs in Germany, according to reports, in the latest sign of Europe's largest carmakers reducing costs under pressure from Chinese rivals.

The Munich-based company has started a voluntary redundancy programme agreed with employee representatives, a BMW spokesperson said yesterday.

The company and its works council had agreed a severance programme targeting the administration and development divisions, the spokesperson said. Production operations are excluded. BMW's total workforce is about 160,000.

Germany's carmakers have come under intense pressure in recent years with the rise of Chinese competitors that have quickly come to dominate in the electric vehicle market. Chinese manufacturers have launched a fierce price war in their home market, which had previously been a lucrative source of export earnings for European brands, including BMW.

Europe's carmakers have also had to find cash for their own transition from petrol to electric, and cope with the impact of US tariffs. Several manufacturers - including Volkswagen, Stellantis and Ford - have turned to partnerships with Chinese rivals to help them build and sell in Europe.

▲ *BMW's headquarters in Munich*

160,000

BMW's total workforce, which will be decreased in Germany through voluntary redundancy

BMW's cuts come after Milan Nedeljković, who was previously head of production, took over as chief executive in May.

A spokesperson for BMW said the group was "proactively shaping the profound changes taking place in its operating environment" including "the technological transformation of the automotive industry, geopolitical uncertainties, changing market conditions and developments in China".

Volkswagen, Germany's largest carmaker by volume, confirmed on Friday that it would cut as many as 100,000 jobs from its total workforce of 650,000. The plans include closing four factories and halving the number of models produced.

Porsche, the sports car brand part-owned by Volkswagen, is also undergoing a severe restructuring. Another 5,000 job cuts were agreed this week, taking total planned redundancies to 9,000 - a fifth of its workforce - by 2035. The Stuttgart-based company reported a €1.4bn (£1.2bn) profit before tax yesterday, up from €1.1bn a year earlier.

Porsche's sales in China slumped by 30% to 14,500 in the first half of 2026, faster than the 17% decline across the group as a whole. Donald Trump's withdrawal of subsidies for electric cars such as Porsche's Taycan also hit North American sales.

Aston Martin has also struggled in China and the US. The Warwickshire-based company's losses grew in the first half of the year despite it saying its turnaround efforts had improved sales.

Yesterday the carmaker reported a loss before tax of £89m in the second quarter of 2026, up from £61m in the same period a year earlier. That left the loss for the first six months at £154m.

The FTSE 250 company's share price rose by 3.5%, however, after it said its performance had "materially improved" during the half year with revenues up 38% to £629m.

Aston Martin has endured years of turmoil since it listed on the London stock market in 2018. It made a fifth of its workers redundant in February.

Additional reporting **PA Media**

A GREGGS PRODUCTION
THE ROLL TRILOGY
INTRODUCING NEW CHICKEN ROLL
CHICKEN ROLL
IN SHOPS NOW
itsu

Greggs sales soar as chain adapts menu to heatwaves

Joanna Partridge
Sarah Butler

Iced matcha lattes and a bigger range of salads and chicken rolls helped Greggs boost sales during the string of summer heatwaves and showed it was adapting to the UK's increasingly hot summers, the bakery chain said yesterday.

Total sales at Britain's biggest fast-food business rose to £1.1bn for the first six months of 2026 - 7.2% higher than the same period a year earlier.

The rise in sales was largely down to extra stores as the chain opened 34 new sites on a net basis, taking its total UK outlets to 2,773 by the end of June. The Newcastle-headquartered company said the new shops had been performing well, which it attributed to its "disciplined focus on high-quality locations".

Sales at the company's existing stores rose by 2.1% between January and June, helped by a wave of price rises on key items at the start of 2026.

Roisin Currie, its chief executive, said Greggs did not expect to put up prices further this year as its prediction for cost inflation had taken a step back to 2% from 3%.

She said the company had been able to hedge 90% of its energy costs for this year and half of those for next year, protecting it from the recent surge in the oil price, while the cost of key commodities such as cocoa and coffee had stepped back after a period of high inflation.

The chain's pre-tax profit rose by almost 20% from a year earlier to £76m for the first half of the year, which it said was because of cost control as well as growth in its "bake at home" range of frozen treats, which it expanded in Iceland supermarkets and launched in Tesco this year.

The results mark a turnaround compared with last summer when its sales and profits were hit as customers shunned pastries such as steak bakes and vegan sausage rolls during periods of hot weather.

That prompted analysts and consumers to ask whether the UK had hit "peak Greggs". Currie insisted otherwise last summer, saying the company had previously bounced back from other downturns.

That revival appears to be well under way, with Greggs saying the introduction of new products on its menus had helped attract health-conscious customers, even during the heatwaves. A chicken roll launched in April was hailed as a "standout success", while Greggs said a relaunched salad range with more protein, including a chicken caesar salad and prawn layered pasta salad, offered healthier lunchtime options.

> *'We've become more resilient as we have seen hot weather become a normality'*
>
> **Roisin Currie**
> *Chief executive, Greggs*

▲ *Greggs says its new chicken roll is a big success; left, it has also widened its iced drinks range, which includes a matcha latte*

PHOTOGRAPH: MIKE KEMP/ INPICTURES/GETTY

Currie said Greggs had adapted to the warmer UK weather by introducing iced drinks last year and a "more compelling" selection of salads this year. "We have become more resilient as we have seen hot weather become more of a normality," she said.

Greggs has also been able to appeal to new and younger customers by offering new drinks, including lemonades and iced matcha, the antioxidant-rich green tea that has become popular with gen Z consumers.

Currie said the latest results showed the company "continued to outperform the market" and it still had room for more outlets, particularly by motorways and in travel hubs, industrial sites and retail parks.

She said: "We remain focused on opening shops in more catchments and introducing convenient ways for customers to pick up Greggs favourites, while broadening and innovating our menu in line with changing tastes and trends."

Fed holds interest rates steady despite Trump calls for a cut

Gaya Gupta

The US Federal Reserve held interest rates steady yesterday, leaving them unchanged for the fifth time since December despite Donald Trump's renewed calls for a cut.

Cooler inflation data published earlier this month eased expectations of an imminent rate rise. But the tenuous peace deal between the US and Iran have made energy prices creep up again, strengthening the case for an increase.

The Fed's federal open market committee voted 9-3 to maintain rates, with three dissenting members wanting to raise them by a quarter of a percentage point. At the Fed's June meeting - its first under the new chair, Kevin Warsh - half of the central bank's 18 members predicted at least one rate rise by the end of the year. Interest rates currently sit at a range of 3.5% to 3.75%.

"Inflation remains elevated relative to the Committee's 2 percent goal, in part reflecting supply shocks that have driven price increases in certain sectors, including energy," the open market committee said in its statement, which once again is noticeably shorter after Warsh's calls for more streamlined communication.

Warsh has signalled he is ushering in a new era at the central bank, one that emphasises a reservedness on forward guidance.

At his first meeting in June, he announced five new taskforces - comprising economics professors, business leaders and former central bank governors - that are meant to rethink how the Fed approaches its communications, data, balance sheet policy and inflation framework, and the impact of artificial intelligence on its policy judgments.

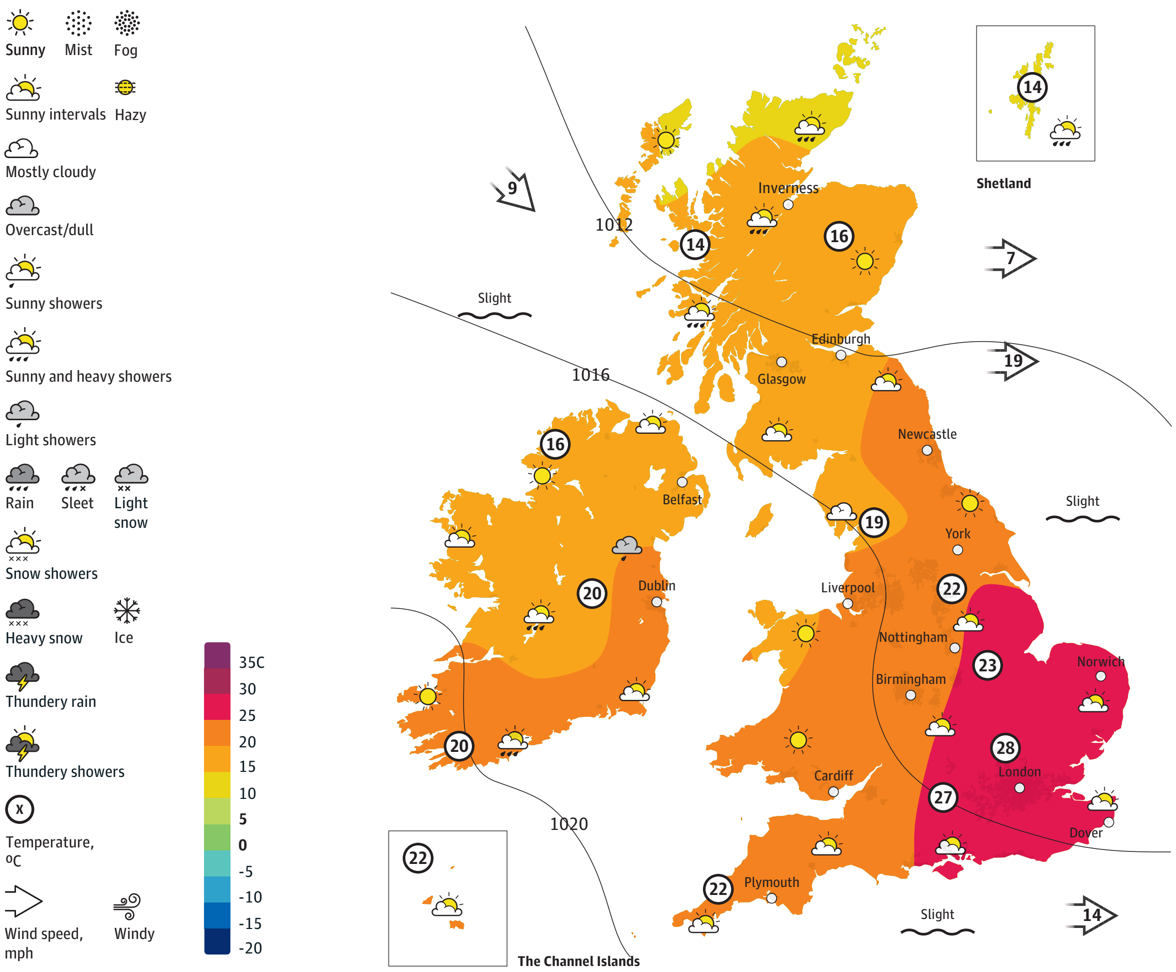
The US-Israel war with Iran, which has endured since the end of February, has pushed energy prices higher for US households and businesses, a pressure Warsh has openly acknowledged and vowed to quash.

"The members of our committee have no tolerance for persistently elevated inflation, and we share a resolute commitment to ensure price stability," he said at a congressional hearing earlier this month.

The Fed's main way to combat higher prices is to increase interest rates. But on Monday Trump repeated his call for interest rates to be lower, saying the US "should have the lowest rates in the world".

Weather
Thursday 30 July 2026

UK and Ireland Noon today


Sunny
Mist
Fog
Sunny intervals
Hazy
Mostly cloudy
Overcast/dull
Sunny showers
Sunny and heavy showers
Light showers
Rain
Sleet
Light snow
Snow showers
Heavy snow
Ice
Thundery rain
Thundery showers
Temperature, ºC
Wind speed, mph
Windy
35C
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
-5
-10
-15
-20
Shetland
14
Inverness
Edinburgh
Glasgow
Newcastle
Belfast
York
Dublin
Liverpool
Nottingham
Birmingham
Norwich
Cardiff
London
Dover
Plymouth
The Channel Islands
22
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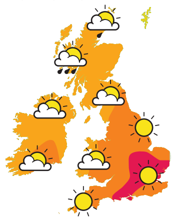
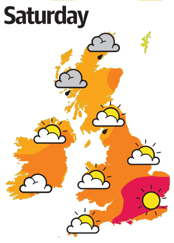
Slight
Slight

Forecast

Low 9 High 20
Tomorrow



Low 10 High 20
Saturday



Carbon count

Daily atmospheric CO_2 readings from Mauna Loa, Hawaii (ppm):

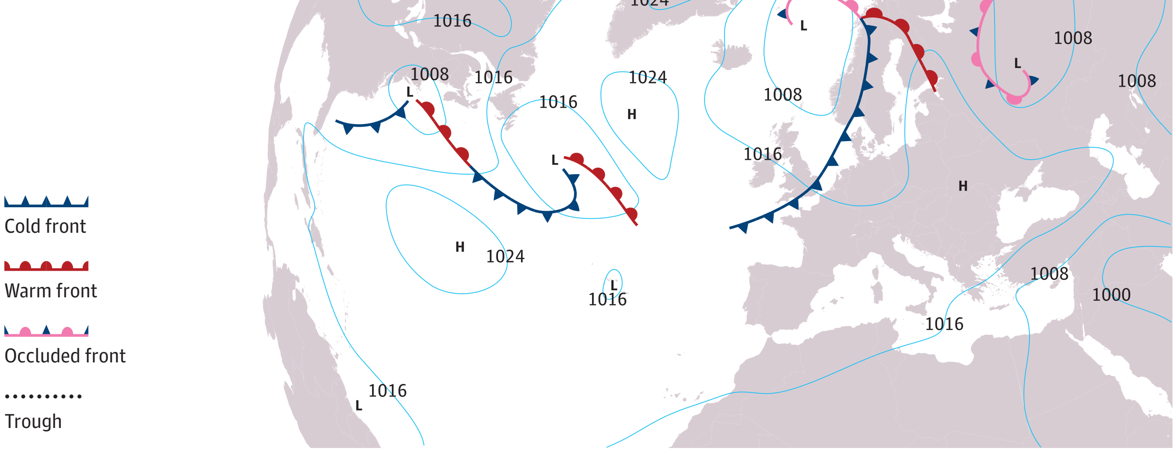
Latest	
28 Jul 2026	429.01
Weekly average	
19 Jul 2026	428.72
29 Jul 2025	427.58
29 Jul 2016	403.35
Pre-industrial base	*280*
Safe level	*350*

Source: NOAA-ESRL

Around the UK

	Lows and highs		Precipitation	Air pollution
London	14	28	15%	Low
Manchester	9	20	5%	Low
Edinburgh	8	18	60%	Low
Belfast	10	17	85%	Low
Birmingham	10	24	5%	Low
Brighton	14	23	5%	Low
Bristol	12	22	10%	Low
Cardiff	11	22	10%	Low
Newcastle	8	20	55%	Low
Penzance	14	21	25%	Low

Atlantic front


Cold front
Warm front
Occluded front
Trough
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High tides

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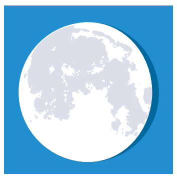
Aberdeen	**0135**	4.1m	**1409**	3.9m
Avonmouth	**0738**	11.9m	**1957**	12.3m
Barrow	**--**	--	**1200**	8.4m
Belfast	**1143**	3.1m	**2349**	3.4m
Cobh	**0552**	3.8m	**1810**	3.9m
Cromer	**0648**	4.8m	**1927**	4.6m
Dover	**1137**	6.3m	**2352**	6.2m
Dublin	**--**	--	**1208**	3.7m
Galway	**0545**	4.6m	**1753**	4.9m
Greenock	**0043**	3.4m	**1256**	3.0m
Harwich	**0008**	3.7m	**1219**	3.8m
Holyhead	**1054**	5.1m	**2302**	5.5m
Hull	**0633**	7.1m	**1908**	6.8m
Leith	**0255**	5.2m	**1522**	5.2m
Liverpool	**1141**	8.6m	**2351**	9.1m
London Bridge	**0217**	6.7m	**1434**	6.7m
Lossiemouth	**0007**	3.9m	**1243**	3.7m
Milford Haven	**0640**	6.4m	**1856**	6.7m
Newquay	**0530**	6.3m	**1746**	6.6m
North Shields	**0342**	4.8m	**1614**	4.7m
Oban	**0619**	3.6m	**1837**	3.9m
Penzance	**0505**	5.0m	**1721**	5.3m
Plymouth	**0612**	4.9m	**1824**	5.2m
Portsmouth	**--**	--	**1211**	4.5m
Southport	**1116**	8.3m	**2326**	8.8m
Stornoway	**0726**	4.2m	**1930**	4.7m
Portland	**0720**	1.8m	**1935**	2.0m
Whitby	**0416**	5.3m	**1646**	5.2m
Wick	**--**	--	**1201**	3.1m
Workington	**--**	--	**1204**	7.6m

Sun & Moon



Sun rises	0521
Sun sets	2051
Moon rises	2122
Moon sets	0558
Last Quarter	6 Aug

AccuWeather.com
Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather** ©2026

Lighting up

Belfast	2130 to 0534
Birm'ham	2102 to 0525
Brighton	2049 to 0525
Bristol	2102 to 0534
Carlisle	2118 to 0519
Cork	2127 to 0555
Dublin	2124 to 0539
Glasgow	2129 to 0521
Harlech	2113 to 0533
Inverness	2136 to 0510
London	2051 to 0522
M'chester	2108 to 0524
Newcastle	2114 to 0514
Norwich	2051 to 0512
Penzance	2108 to 0550

Weatherwatch

Have you ever wondered how far a raindrop has travelled before it falls? It may have come thousands of miles from the ocean, sea or lake it evaporated from – and now research shows raindrops travel even farther than they used to.

Warmer air can hold more water vapour, and that is changing not only how much rain we receive but also where it falls. Travis Aerenson, of the University of Wyoming, and his colleagues modelled atmospheric moisture movements in the US over more than three decades, showing that in the south-western and southern plains, moisture in the atmosphere travels 30 to 50 miles farther than 35 years ago, staying aloft for an extra two to four hours before falling as rain.

Their findings, published in Geophysical Research Letters, also show that more evaporation is occurring from ocean surfaces and less from land surfaces. This affects where and when precipitation occurs, with implications for land use. The researchers also note that the trend for moisture to travel farther will result in the water security of more countries and states falling increasingly outside their borders, requiring greater collaboration between neighbours.

Kate Ravilious

Around the world

Algiers	33	Lisbon	28
Ams'dam	26	Madrid	39
Athens	33	Malaga	30
Auckland	16	Melb'rne	12
B Aires	16	Mexico C	25
Bangkok	32	Miami	35
Barcelona	31	Milan	39
Basra	48	Mombasa	29
Beijing	33	Moscow	21
Berlin	37	Mumbai	29
Bermuda	30	N Orleans	35
Brussels	27	Nairobi	23
Budapest	36	New Delhi	34
C'hagen	26	New York	23
Cairo	38	Oslo	23
Cape Town	21	Paris	32
Chicago	31	Perth	21
Corfu	35	Prague	36
Dakar	31	Reykjavik	16
Dhaka	28	Rio de J	25
Dublin	20	Rome	35
Florence	38	Shanghai	36
Gibraltar	27	Singapore	31
H Kong	29	Stockh'm	26
Harare	23	Strasb'g	37
Helsinki	23	Sydney	16
Istanbul	28	Tel Aviv	33
Jo'burg	19	Tenerife	27
K Lumpur	31	Tokyo	33
K'mandu	27	Toronto	27
Kabul	34	Vancouv'r	22
Kingston	33	Vienna	37
Kolkata	30	Warsaw	32
L Angeles	30	Wash'ton	30
Lagos	28	Well'ton	14
Lima	25	Zurich	37

Racing
Bow Echo again betters Gstaad at Goodwood
Page 39 →

Golf
Hull shooting for Open glory after multiple misses
Page 40 →

Sport

◀ *Luke Littler and Tadej Pogacar looked unstoppable as they won the World Matchplay and the Tour de France*
REUTERS; AP

Double tops

Littler and Pogacar in a class of their own, but nothing lasts for ever

Jonathan Liew

Treble-20. *"Ohh, he couldn't."* Treble-19. *"Oh, you spiteful young man."* Bull. *"You spiteful person! That is ridiculous!"* As ever, Wayne Mardle - commentating on the World Matchplay final for Sky Sports on Sunday night - put it most succinctly of all.

The great individual champions require a vindictive streak. The ability not just to harness their own strength, but to tessellate it with their opponent's moment of greatest vulnerability. To sense weakness, recognise doubt and pounce mercilessly upon it. To nurture and desire the very same qualities we try to extinguish and discourage in our children. To find a 167 checkout, when your opponent is sitting on double-10, in a major final.

To be fair to Luke Littler, he would probably have won whatever he did, however he threw his darts, whether he did it kindly or not. Such is the gulf he enjoys over what we so euphemistically describe as "his competition". Gerwyn Price went into Sunday's final playing perhaps the best darts of his life; arguably better than when he won the world championship in 2021. Of all the contenders to Littler's crown, Price seems to have thought hardest about how to get into the teenager's headspace, how not to be cowed, how to use the crowd and his own overwhelming self-belief to make himself the problem. Littler destroyed him 18-9 in just over an hour.

This was Littler's second consecutive World Matchplay crown, to go with a second consecutive world championship and a second consecutive UK Open. There are 11 major competitions in the calendar and Littler has won six out of six this year, the past eight in a row, nine of the past 11. His order of merit tally of £3.1m is more than treble that of Luke Humphries in second place. A run of 36 wins in his past 37 matches in ranking tournaments stands comparison with the great Phil Taylor, who was throwing against lesser fields in a less professional era.

More than 800 miles away, on the slopes of Le Lioran, a similar phenomenon was unfolding. Yes, on an important level, I realise Littler and Tadej Pogacar are very different athletes. But having watched a good deal of both, I've been struck above all by the similarities, the common sensations, the curious paradox that arises when you see someone so good at what they do that people accuse them of ruining it for everyone else.

"It's like watching two different sports," the TNT Sports commentator gushed as Pogacar surged past Richard Carapaz on stage 10 on the way to stretching his lead over Jonas Vingegaard to an almost impregnable three minutes. This was the stage when the Bastille Day crowds began to boo Pogacar for the stranglehold he has begun to exert on the sport. "Haters gonna hate," Pogacar said, and other riders would also spring to his defence. At the heart of all this lay a question: to what extent do we want to see dominant athletes dominate?

For Pogacar, these are questions loaded by road cycling's toxic history. No matter how many doping tests he passes, no matter how much transparency he offers, there is a constituency of cycling fans for whom dominance will always equal suspicion. And - important - a suspicion that can never truly be refuted. You don't trust the anti-doping protocols and you don't truly believe the Tour can be won clean. Why are you even watching this sport in the first place?

For Littler, by contrast, the fascination lies in the very absence of exegesis, the sheer inadequacy of the darting vocabulary to contextualise what it is he does. The Littler supremacy consists of a vibe, an implication, a terror, the sense he can win a game however he wants. He can destroy you in minutes or hours; from the front or coming from behind, with a smile or a snarl. The result may never be in contention, but virtually everything else is.

> *Luke Littler has won six out of six major titles this year*

As with Pogacar, Littler's dominance has drawn as much negative as positive comment in recent months. Part of the moral panic is that they are still young - Pogacar 27, Littler 19, both capable of demoralising an entire generation of challengers.

Even the very greatest dominate only fleetingly. Eddy Merckx, perhaps Pogacar's only remaining rival as the greatest cyclist of all time, won pretty much everything he won in an eight-year stretch from 1967 to 1975. Roger Federer's imperial phase lasted for six years; Usain Bolt's and Steffi Graf's roughly eight.

The weekend before last, I went to the London Stadium to watch another seemingly invincible athlete do their thing. Mondo Duplantis had broken the men's pole vault world record 13 times in four years and would inevitably break it again. Except, he didn't. He got injured and had to make do with second place with a still-unfathomable height of 5.95m.

Far from feeling short-changed, I left feeling strangely melancholy, reminded that what felt inexorable at the time was not a new normal, but a brief anomaly. Perhaps we underestimate the ephemerality of true dominance, the extent to which it is not a permanent state of affairs, but a temporary aligning of the planets, the elusiveness of pure perfection.

Pogacar, Littler, Duplantis, Jannik Sinner, Barcelona Women, Australia Women: hate them if you must. But know too that it could all be gone tomorrow.

Australia's Hoare clarifies he did not witness murder in Glasgow

Runner confirms he was on a training run six miles away from the scene of the crime

Sean Ingle
Scotstoun Stadium

It is not every day a reigning Commonwealth Games champion is asked whether he witnessed a murder in Glasgow. Then again, it has been quite a few days for the Australian 1500m runner Olli Hoare. After competing yesterday in the heats of the men's mile – when he finished with bloodied knees after being tripped – the 29-year-old was asked about reports that he had come across a murder scene while out training with his teammate Ky Robinson.

"No, no, I didn't see a murder," Hoare said. "The murder that was reported was six miles away and also at a different time."

Hoare and Robinson were heckled as they ran, though, with at least one of those shouting at the pair holding a knife and, as a result, the Australia team have been told not to wear their kit in the city.

It was thought initially the pair had witnessed the aftermath of the murder of Paul McMinigal, in the east end of the city, on Friday. "I don't know how that came about because Ky and I were running in the afternoon," Hoare said. "We're running on the river. Somehow these Chinese whispers have come in."

Hoare's good friend Jake Wightman, the Scotland 1500m runner who is staying in the same hotel as the Australians, said: "I am sure I am allowed to say it, he saw someone with a knife. That was it. And now they were saying he was in a murder scene. They're two stories put together. But we're joking that he ran out on the track with a stab-proof vest.

"Glasgow is like any city. There's good and bad parts and you see some things you don't necessarily want to see. Unfortunately, he ran into the middle of that and I hope it didn't affect him.

"We were having a laugh about it, just because of all the weeks you want Glasgow to look as best, on his first run that happens."

Hoare was determined to move on. "We came across a police dispute," he said. "There were people walking around saying things. But I was never threatened.

"There was nothing heinous about what was happening. We were just running through, and there were some characters, and that was it."

Asked whether they were carrying knives or not, Hoare said: "They looked like they were carrying something, but they weren't threatening us. There was police there. They were breaking up a dispute when Ky and I ran past and we didn't even think to report it.

"When we came back, all of a sudden I had Jake Wightman and all the boys coming up saying 'you're in the papers', and I was like: 'For what? Did I offend somebody wearing an Aussie beer T-shirt?'"

As for what had been shouted at him, Hoare said: "I don't think it's an appropriate thing to repeat so I won't. But it doesn't just happen here; it happens everywhere.

"The next day, I didn't wear the team uniform because I didn't want to bring attention to myself and I think particularly for the women running around, they're in a much more different position than I am.

"At that point I thought: 'Well, it's better to save the kit because I don't have a laundry machine.' I can't wash everything, and I want to make sure everything looks nice, so you don't have sweat stains in the race. That was the main thing."

At least Hoare's day improved as he was reinstated by appeal into the final on Saturday. However, he has a major task on his hands against Josh Kerr, the young Australian superstar Cam Myers, and Wightman, the world 1500m silver medallist, who all looked strong in their heats.

Kerr was in an especially confident mood after winning his heat in 3min 58.57sec. "It's going to be a war out there," he said. "It's the home crowd,

Glasgow kiss

Idi Amin's grandson disqualified for butt

The Commonwealth Games debut of Idi Amin's grandson ended in ignominy as the boxer was disqualified in the third round for butting his English opponent, Damar Thomas, and then launched a verbal assault on the referee. Aziz Abdul, a 25-year-old from Uganda, also refused to speak to a journalist afterwards because of what he had written about the tyrannical dictator. Abdul planted the butt on Thomas when he was 20-16 down on the scorecards. Afterwards he complained that the decision was unfair. "There were a lot of fouls," he said. "Holding, elbowing, a lot of bullshit." Sean Ingle

CANADA
AHL
TSHITE

▲ *Middle-distance runner Olli Hoare trips during a heat of the men's mile*
MARTIN RICKETT/PA

Ngake's real-life movie script ends with medal for England

Sean Ingle
SEC Armadillo

First Madias Ngake lifted the weight of an upright piano to her shoulders. Then, with another staggering act of power and defiance, she sent a 128kg barbell high above her head.

And, just like that, the 34-year-old Team England weightlifter had won a silver medal and written one of the most remarkable stories of these Games.

Fourteen years ago, Ngake fled the London 2012 Olympic village after finishing sixth in her competition and ended up sleeping rough for a month.

The reason? She was competing for Cameroon, where homosexuality is illegal, and someone in the team had found out that she was a lesbian. Thus began a journey that led to Ngake giving up elite sport for more than a decade, deciding to come back in 2023, and then transferring allegiances to Britain a year later.

"When I left the Olympics in 2012 I got on a bus," she said. "After the last stop, they told me: 'This is closed,' so I can't go anywhere. So I decided I will sleep outside at the bus stop. I slept rough for about a month. Nobody looked after me.

"I had to leave because someone on the team knew about my situation, that I am a lesbian."

But having won a European medal this year, Ngake showed her strength as she led the women's 87kg competition after the first event, the snatch, with a powerful lift of 108kg.

That put her 3kg clear of Australia's Eileen Cikamatana. However, in the clean and jerk, Cikamatana was able to thrust a barbell 140kg over her head as if it was a rag doll to score a combined lift of 245kg – a Games record – to take gold by 6kg.

But Ngake was not too disappointed afterwards. Asked if her life was like a movie, she replied: "Yes. And I never believed I would ever be here."

◀ *Madias Ngake with her red hair, denoting Cameroon, where she was born, and her silver medal*

Ngake's hair was dyed red, the colour of her home country. Afterwards she said that it had been the idea of Emily Campbell, Team GB's double Olympic medallist, who competes today.

Ngake also explained it was only after 2017 that she was legally able to work. She was an office cleaner in Leeds for nine years, earning about £2,000 a year. However, she has recently moved to Nottingham to train as a full-time athlete and hopes to make the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028.

Amazingly, if she were to win an Olympic medal, it would be her second. That is because in 2019, she was awarded a bronze medal from London 2012 after three weightlifters who finished above her at the Games were disqualified for doping offences.

However, as the medal was sent to Cameroon, Ngake has never seen it as she has not been back to her home country.

"I would like to have it, yes," she said. "But I don't think it's going to be possible because the medal is in Cameroon and there is a situation and I don't want to do politics."

But Ngake knows how to do medals. And her adopted country were certainly delighted last night.

Ramsay-Peaty takes silver on Australia's day

Yara El-Shaboury
Tollcross Swimming Centre

After six days of Australian dominance in the pool, the swimming programme at Glasgow 2026 came to a close in familiar fashion as the green and gold claimed one final victory after finishing with an extraordinary 37 gold, 16 silver and 23 bronze medals in the water. The closing race also produced a slice of Commonwealth Games history as South Africa's bronze in the men's 4x100m medley relay earned Chad le Clos a record-breaking 21st Commonwealth Games medal, making him the most decorated athlete in the competition's history.

Adam Ramsay-Peaty, meanwhile, bowed out of the Games with a silver medal after England finished runners-up to Australia in the final swimming event. Australia surged

SCOTLAND
KERR
NEW ZEALA
TANNER
KEEN

it's our track, it's our crowd. The rest of the guys want to take what's ours. They will have to come with something on Saturday night because they are not going to get it easy."

Kerr wore his custom-made Brooks Hyperion 222 spikes used to break the mile world record, which are super fast but contain no heel. "It definitely felt a little bit overkill – like driving a Formula One car along the street for a cup of coffee," he said.

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through to secure gold in a Games record of 3min 28.71sec, while England's quartet of Oliver Morgan, Ramsay-Peaty, Edward Mildred and Jacob Mills claimed silver in 3:30.68.

Morgan gave England a strong start with a 53.20 opening leg before Ramsay-Peaty kept them in second with a 58.74 split. Mildred slipped briefly to third on the third leg despite clocking 51.04, before Jacob Mills produced a 47.70 anchor to haul England back into second.

"To come in with the boys and get a silver medal, I can't complain whatsoever," said Morgan. "Some of us have had tough weeks but it shows the resilience we've had in the team."

In the penultimate race, Scotland rounded off their memorable night with a silver medal in the women's 4x100m medley relay after coming out in kilts as Australia stormed to gold in another record time.

"It's absolutely amazing," said Katie Shanahan. "There's no better way to finish off a home meet than by getting that silver medal. It's just been such an amazing meet."

"It's something we save for the last night," said Evelyn Davis on walking out with kilts on. "Katie's falling off in the walkout actually calmed my nerves a bit before the crowd got going again, so it was good fun."

Shanahan, Angharad Evans and Keanna MacInnes battled for the lead throughout before Davis produced a composed anchor leg to hold off South Africa and Canada to secure second place.

Earlier Evans had delighted the home support by winning a second breaststroke gold of the Games. The 23-year-old followed up her 100m breaststroke triumph by winning the women's 200m breaststroke.

South Africa's Pieter Coetze retained his men's 100m backstroke crown in emphatic fashion. He clocked a Commonwealth Games record of 51.77 to collect his third gold medal in Glasgow.

Angharad Evans helps Scotland to a medal in the medley relay

Racing

Billy 'The Kid' takes a bow after Echo gets out of trouble

Greg Wood
Goodwood

▲ *Bow Echo, in yellow colours, on his way to a Sussex Stakes victory*
ANDREW MATTHEWS/PA

Billy Loughnane threw his goggles towards an ecstatic crowd packed around the winner's enclosure as he returned after a thrilling, unforgettable success on Bow Echo in the Sussex Stakes yesterday. He missed, but it was the only mistake he made all day.

Technically at least, Billy "the Kid" is still a fair nickname for Bow Echo's 20-year-old jockey. This, though, was a coming-of-age moment for horse and rider that should see the pair of them graduate to the turf's established elite.

Loughnane was brilliant on Bow Echo: cool, confident, patient and then decisive as he extracted the three-year-old from a scrum of horses at the two-furlong pole and launched him down the middle of the track. Ryan Moore and Gstaad, the runner-up behind Bow Echo in the 2,000 Guineas and St James's Palace Stakes, grabbed a useful lead while his old rival was stuck in traffic, but Loughnane had total confidence in Bow Echo's finishing speed and they chased him down, amid a huge roar from the stands, with a few strides to spare.

Bow Echo is now unbeaten in six starts and the first horse since the incomparable Frankel to complete the milers' triple crown of wins in the 2,000 Guineas, St James's Palace Stakes and Sussex Stakes. His jockey, meanwhile, is swiftly becoming the public face of Flat racing – an heir to Lester and Frankie whose first name is enough, and a showman who enjoys the winning moments every bit as much as his backers.

"We have watched millions of these races back," Loughnane said of himself and George Boughey, Bow Echo's trainer, "and we always felt that the closer would almost certainly get up.

"We knew there would be plenty of pace. Once I found Ryan's tail, I was happy enough, but then Christophe [Soumillon, on Puerto Rico] appeared on my outside, so I knew I was going to have a bit of a challenge getting him out. Once he did, he really motored home.

"Today was a tough race for him. There were plenty of runners and we ended up a long way back, but he has got a proper engine."

After a slightly scrambled short-head defeat of Gstaad at Ascot last month, this half-length success, in Bow Echo's first race in all-aged company, cemented his status as the best miler in Europe, with the strong possibility of further improvement to come.

"He has been in a couple of scraps recently and he's shown fight today," Boughey said. "I know it sounds mad, as he is unbeaten, but he is improving. He is learning to race and learning to get in a scrap."

Bow Echo may head to France for his next start, in either the Prix Jacques le Marois at Deauville or the Prix du Moulin at Longchamp, while his long-term target is the Breeders' Cup Mile at Keeneland in Kentucky on 31 October.

For Loughnane, it could be another career high, and on a global stage, at just 20 years of age. "He is a real showboy, is he not?," Boughey said. "He loves it. I was pretty nervous today going into the paddock, and he was just chilled out."

Results

Football

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Second qualifying round: Second leg Gornik 1 Fenerbahce 1 (agg 1-2); Hapoel Be'er Sheva 2 Víkingur 0 (agg 3-2); Kairat 1 Omonia 0 (aet; agg 1-1; Kairat 6-5 pens); Kauno 1 KÍ 0 (agg 1-0); Lech Poznan 1 AGF 4 (aet; agg 5-5; AGF 4-3 pens); Red Star 5 Larne 0 (agg 9-0); Slovan Bratislava 1 Iberia 1999 1 (agg 3-1); Uni Craiova 2 Levski Sofia 2 (agg 2-3)

CONFERENCE LEAGUE

Second qualifying round: Second leg Copenhagen 2 Polissya 1 (agg 5-4); Dukagjini 1 Lugano 5 (agg 1-6); Rapid Vienna 6 FC Santa Coloma 2 (agg 9-3)

Commonwealth Games

3X3 BASKETBALL

Men's gold medal match: England 19 Australia 17
Men's bronze medal match: Scotland 18 New Zealand 16

Women's gold medal match: Australia 21 Uganda 11
Women's bronze medal match: New Zealand 18 Jamaica 13

3X3 WHEELCHAIR BASKETBALL

Men's gold medal match: Australia 19 England 13
Men's bronze medal match: Canada 19 Scotland 9

Women's gold medal match: England 18 Scotland 10
Women's bronze medal match: Australia 19 Canada 17

ATHLETICS

MEN'S LONG JUMP: 1 T Gayle (Jam) 8.15; **2** Sreeshankar (Ind) 8.09; **3** S MacKenzie (Sco) 8.08.

WOMEN'S SHOT PUT: 1 S Mitton (Can) 19.88; **2** J Oji (Ngr) 17.87; **3** L Cameron (Jam) 17.87.

WOMEN'S 3,000M STEEPLECHASE: 1 F Cherotich (Ken) 9:01.76; **2** E Thorner (Eng) 9:05.45; **3** P Chemutai (Uga) 9:09.96.

PARA ATHLETICS

WOMEN'S DISCUS F42-44/F61-64: 1 G Nwachukwu (Ngr) 39.66; **2** F Oduwaiye (Wal) 38.52; **3** B Cronin (Wal) 36.00.

WOMEN'S 1500m T54 FINAL: 1 M Woods (Sco) 3:33.39; **2** E Kottas (Eng) 4:22.07; **3** M Dingley (Aus) 4:42.25.

MEN'S DISCUS F42-44/F61-64: 1 A Davies (Wal) 48.38; **2** P Halgahawela (Sri) 46.84; **3** A Stewart (Tri) 56.82.

MEN'S 100M T47: 1 DM Gavit (Ind) 10.71; **2** MB Morssinganakath (Ind) 10.83; **3** K Santos (Eng) 10.85.

SWIMMING

MEN'S 100m BACKSTROKE: 1 P Coetze (SA) 51.77; **2** O Morgan (Eng) 52.66; **3** R van Renen (SA) 53.31.

WOMEN'S 200m BREASTSTROKE: 1 A Evans (Sco) 2:23.79; **2** K Corbett (SA) 2:24.46; **3** E McCartney (Eng) 2:24.73.

MEN'S 200m FREESTYLE: 1 K Taylor (Aus) 1:45.22; **2** J Guy (Eng) 1:45.72; **3** M Richards (Wal) 1:45.72.

WOMEN'S 50m FREESTYLE: 1 M Harris (Aus) 25.23; **2** A Perkins (Aus) 24.53; **3** S Jack (Aus) 24.57.

MEN'S 50m BUTTERFLY: 1 K Chalmers (Aus) & B Armbruster (Aus) 22.73; **3** C McEvoy (Aus) 22.92.

WOMEN'S 200m BUTTERFLY: 1 B Castelluzzo (Aus) 2:06.56; **2** K MacInnes (Sco) 2:06.76; **3** L Dekkers (Aus) 2:06.91.

MEN'S 1500m FREESTYLE FASTEST HEAT: 1 S Short (Aus) 14:42.11; **2** D Wiffen (NI) 14:44.70; **3** B Goedemans (Aus) 14:49.50.

WOMEN'S 4 x 100m MEDLEY RELAY: 1 Australia 3:54.25; **2** Scotland 3:57.02; **3** South Africa 3:58.58.

MEN'S 4 x 100m MEDLEY RELAY: 1 Australia 3:28.71; **2** England 3:30.68; **3** South Africa 3:31.13.

PARA SWIMMING

WOMEN'S 100m FREESTYLE S9 : 1 L Patterson (Aus) 1:02.99; **2** E Beecroft (Aus) 1:03.56; **3** T Shaw (Sco) 1:04.71.

MEN'S 50m FREESTYLE S7: 1 C Sadie (SA) 28.06; **2** Toh W-S (Sin) 29.36; **3** B Dee (Eng) 31.33.

WEIGHTLIFTING

WOMEN'S 77KG: 1 S Stowers (Sam) 237; **2** I Brown (Eng) 229; **3** L Hughes (Wal) 224.

MEN'S 94KG: 1 MSB Nor-Ghazali (Mal) 347; **2** A Bellemarre (Can) 346; **3** OR Saxton (Aus) 336.

WOMEN'S 86KG: 1 EFM Cikamatana (Aus) 248; **2** M Ngake (Eng) 239; **3** R Beaudoin (Can) 230.

Cricket

THE HUNDRED WOMEN

Sophia Gardens Welsh Fire 129-3. Trent Rockets 132-2 (BL Mooney 57). Trent Rockets beat Welsh Fire by eight wickets.

The Kia Oval MI London 151-4. London Spirit 151-5. Match tied.

THE HUNDRED MEN

Sophia Gardens Welsh Fire 122-7. Trent Rockets 126-1 (BM Duckett 52 no). Trent Rockets beat Welsh Fire by nine wickets.

Kia Oval MI London 164-5 (WG Jacks 65). London Spirit 165-3 (LG Pretorius 64). London Spirit beat MI London by seven wickets.

METRO BANK ONE DAY CUP MEN

Gosforth Glamorgan 326-6 (EJ Byrom 76, Zain-ul-Hassan 65). Durham 328-7 (WMH Rhodes 148 no, KL Aldridge 78). Durham beat Glamorgan by three wickets.

York Worcestershire 230 (HJ Cullen 70, DH Lategan 67, MJ Waite 53). Yorkshire 231-4 (W Luxton 126). Yorkshire beat Worcestershire by six wickets.

Edgbaston Warwickshire 341-4 (EG Barnard 140, VL Jani 66 no, ZUA Malik 58). Surrey 296 (DP Sibley 74, JW Blake 71; OJ Hannon-Dalby 5-60). Warwickshire beat Surrey by 45 runs.

Arundel Essex 316-8 (NRM Thain 102, T Westley 81, MJJ Critchley 64). Sussex 320-5 (C Tear 73, JA Leaning 59, JJ Carson 53). Sussex beat Essex by five wickets.

Tennis

ATP/WTA MUBADALA CITI DC OPEN (Washington D.C.)

Men: Singles: Last 16: L Musetti (It) bt A Vukic (Aus) 6-3 5-7 6-3

Women: Singles: Last 16: L Samsonova (Rus) bt Wang X (Chn) 6-2 6-2; **A Eala** (Phi) bt L Fernandez (Can) 6-2 7-6 (1)

Greg Wood's racing tips

Goodwood 1.50 Ciarra Abu **2.25** Flann Sunna **3.00** Sahara King **3.35** Friendly Soul (nb) **4.10** Pilu (nap) **4.45** The Ginger Kid **5.20** Clarity **5.55** Exclusive Code
Nottingham 2.00 Roots In Touche **2.35** Relevant Range **3.10** Bee Farmer **3.45** Marquessofanglesey **4.20** Sixty Plus **4.55** Muddy Nora **5.25** Poet's Dawn
Wolverhampton 4.35 My Mate Mackley **5.10** Between Me And U **5.47** Chimes Of Thunder **6.22** Supreme Star **6.57** Jungle Drums **7.32** Goldfinder **8.07** Emery Down **8.42** Reputation
Epsom 5.30 Magical Merlin **6.05** Out Of This World **6.40** Imperial Cult **7.15** Trio **7.50** Credit Forgedd It **8.25** Twirler

Fixtures

Football (6pm unless stated)
Europa League
Second qualifying round: Second leg Anderlecht v Hammarby (7.30pm) (agg 1-1); Benfica v St Gallen (8pm) (agg 1-2); CSKA Sofia v Qarabag (7pm) (agg 0-0); Ferencvaros v Twente (7.30pm) (agg 2-1); Hradec Kralove v Tromsø (agg 1-0); Maccabi Tel Aviv v Sheriff (5pm) (agg 5-0); Midtjylland v Besiktas (agg 0-1); Pafos v Hajduk Split (agg 0-2); PAOK v Dynamo Kyiv (6.45pm) (agg 3-2)
Conference League
Second qualifying round: Second leg *(selected)* Coleraine v HJK (7.45pm) (agg 0-5); HB v Motherwell (agg 0-2); Hibernian v Malisheva (8pm) (agg 0-2); The New Saints v Flora (6.30pm) (agg 0-1)

Rugby league
Betfred Super League
Huddersfield v Hull FC (8pm)

Cricket
The Hundred Women
Southern Brave v Birmingham Phoenix, Utilita Bowl (3pm)
The Hundred Men
Southern Brave v Birmingham Phoenix, Utilita Bowl (6.30pm)
Metro Bank One Day Cup Men
Group A Lancashire v Nottinghamshire, Preston

Fleming on verge of England Test coach job

Simon Burnton

Stephen Fleming is expected to be named as England's Test coach, after impressing the England and Wales Cricket Board in interviews. The 53-year-old would work alongside his predecessor, compatriot, former teammate and friend Brendon McCullum, who remains in charge of the white-ball teams.

Fleming stood down as head coach of the Indian Premier League franchise Chennai Super Kings - as well as their subsidiaries Joburg Super Kings in South Africa's SA20 and Texas Super Kings in America's Major League Cricket - this month. That announcement was made after CSK finished eighth out of 10 teams in this year's IPL, following on from a last-place finish in 2025, but also less than 24 hours after McCullum was sacked by the ECB as Test coach.

It is expected Fleming will be in place for the tour of South Africa starting in December, but the three-Test series against Pakistan that begins at Headingley on 19 August may still be overseen by an interim, probably Marcus Trescothick.

Fleming has extensive experience of English cricket, not just from playing 10 Tests and 17 ODIs in this country between 1994 and 2004, but also from spells at Middlesex, Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire. He also coached Southern Brave in the Hundred for two years, leaving in 2024.

▲ *Brendon McCullum played under Stephen Fleming for New Zealand*

He was approached by England in 2009, shortly after he retired as a player, only to turn them down. "I was flattered to be offered," he said. "It came down to the fact it wasn't my time. If I get another couple of years [as a coach] I can see if it is what I want to do and if I would be any good at it."

England ended up turning to Andy Flower, who, having been the early frontrunner to replace McCullum, has now returned the favour by rejecting the job and opening the door for Fleming's appointment.

Fleming's relationship with McCullum gave him an advantage over his rivals for the England job, the Australian Tom Moody, the former England batter and Afghanistan coach Jonathan Trott and Richard Dawson, the head coach at Glamorgan.

Beyond their friendship, the pair have been business associates at two companies, the software company CricHQ and the export business Quality New Zealand. Daniel Vettori, another former New Zealand captain coaching in England, at Sunrisers Leeds, described the pair as "very good friends" with "a lot of similar traits".

McCullum made 126 of his 432 international appearances under Fleming's captaincy before taking over from him and has described him as a major influence.

Golf *AIG Women's Open*

Korda brings the Open stardust but backs home favourite Hull

World No 1 is being guided by her parents and sister - 'they've seen every side of me and know me the best'

Ewan Murray
Royal Lytham & St Annes

▲ *England's Charlie Hull has finished second in five majors*
WARREN LITTLE/GETTY IMAGES

▲ *Nelly Korda endured a frustrating 2025 but has dominated this year*

Nelly Korda is the likeliest winner of the Women's Open, but there is no question who would be the most popular. Charley Hull's brushes with major glory - she has five runner-up finishes - have only intensified a widespread desire for the 30-year-old to break through the tape. Royal Lytham & St Annes provides the latest opportunity for the flamboyant Englishwoman.

Korda arrived in Lancashire with half her four major triumphs having come in 2026. Perhaps the Floridian can afford to be generous and she has endorsed Hull's prospects. "She's such a great personality," Korda said. "It would be great for her to do it on home soil, too. She's an amazing player. I enjoy playing with her. It would be great for the game."

Hull does not seem the type to be dispirited by close shaves. A year ago she was pipped by Miyu Yamashita. Hull finished a shot adrift of Korda, the champion, in the US Women's Open last month. "That's sometimes how she goes," Korda said. "It's about putting yourself in that position. You can't control what others are doing, but she's doing something right to always be there and be relevant, to be in the hunt.

"It's like Sam Burns. He's been in the hunt a lot during major championships, hasn't got it done. Eventually he will. You can't get discouraged, it has to be encouraging."

History is in Hull's favour. The last time the Women's Open visited here, in 2018, England's Georgia Hall claimed her maiden major victory. A scorched links will render this a wonderful test. Korda estimates she will employ her driver five times per round at most, instead adding a four-iron to her armoury.

This is also something of a trial run, with the men's Open due to make a long-awaited return in 2028.

Korda is more comfortable than ever at being the name on everyone's lips. Early in her career, the world No 1 struggled with fame and attention. Having parents who were professional tennis players, a brother who still competes in that domain and a sister who is also on the LPGA Tour has helped with her mindset. So, too, has a frustrating 2025.

"My family always make sure my batteries are recharged," she said. "It's a funny conversation; my dad and my mum are always telling me to take more days off. I'm like: 'No, no, I don't want to. I want to grind on my craft.'

"There gets a point in the season where I'm really tired. It's not just golf. It's not just like the travel. It's kind of a combination of everything people don't really see behind the scenes.

"My parents are people I go to all the time for advice. My sister, too. She has been at a lot of majors this year. Those are my people. I'm so comfortable and vulnerable with them. They've seen every side of me and know me the best.

"I decided I need to stop getting so frustrated with everything. I hit a great shot, it goes in a divot and I would get frustrated. What is going on? Why am I getting these bounces? It's draining having that attitude. I just told myself: 'I'm not going to have this attitude.'"

Lytham stardust also includes Lydia Ko, who beat Korda to the Women's Open title in 2024. Ko has taken inspiration from her fellow New Zealander Ryan Fox after his Open glory at nearby Royal Birkdale. Fox became the fourth player from New Zealand to win a major title, reducing Ko to tears as she watched from the west coast of the US.

"He's very humble and I would say he's your typical Kiwi guy that happens to be a freak athlete," Ko said. "I went to work out and everywhere I went I was like: 'Please turn on the Open.' It ended up not working on the TV so I had my trainer turn it on my cellphone. I can't remember my workout at all because my whole focus was there.

"I took an Uber ride back home. As soon as I got home he was on the 18th and when I saw that drive I was so relieved, but so excited, super pumped.

"I screamed when his winning putt went in. I closed the door and I screamed. My husband ran out and was like: 'What's happening?' Ten seconds later, I was crying."

Formula One

Domenicali hits back: 'Fans are loving new rules'

Giles Richards

Stefano Domenicali has issued a stout rebuttal to critics of Formula One's new regulations, claiming most fans are enjoying the sport more than ever.

The Formula One chief executive also confirmed that this season's finale would be staged in Europe if the last two grands prix, in Qatar and Abu Dhabi, are called off due to the Middle East war.

Lando Norris, the defending world champion, hit out at F1 in Hungary last week for putting profit before the sport to attract engine manufacturers with the new regulations. The focus on electrical energy management has been roundly disliked by drivers.

Domenicali, however, argued F1's fanbase did not share the objections. "There is a lot of action on the track, people are loving it. They are focused on what is happening on the track," he said. "They don't understand our technology, 'clipping' or whatever it is, because it's too technical.

"For the vast majority of the people, trust me, they just want to see what is happening on the track. They're not interested in the angle of throttle or the percentage of brake pressure in how you can take and overtake a driver."

According to F1's figures, attendances have risen and there has been a growth in global TV audiences, although the broadcast numbers were not given. Most striking was the continued change in the demographics. F1 says 42% of its audience is now female, with women making up three-quarters of new fans, while 43% of the total fanbase is under 35.

The 61-year-old said F1 would make a decision by mid-September on whether the races in Qatar and Abu Dhabi would go ahead. "If the situation will not be cleared the way that we believe it should be, we will take the decision," he added. "If this will not be possible, the end of the season will be in Europe, because we cannot go in other places." Imola in Italy is believed to be the favoured venue.

England's heroes of 1966 were fun, humble and so unlike today's stars

After lifting the trophy 60 years ago today, the players were unaffected by fame during a much simpler era

Garry Richardson

With each passing World Cup I am reminded of the times I spent in the company of those wonderful "Boys of 66". What a privilege it was getting to know them in a much simpler era when, unlike today's mollycoddled stars, household names remained unaffected by money and fame.

Where were you on 30 July 1966, the day England won the World Cup? I was at my nan and grandad's house. They had a minute television which seemed no bigger than a matchbox. Intermittently the picture, which was in black and white, would roll around the screen. It was infuriating. My grandad talked about needing to get the "horizontal hold fixed" (unless you are of a certain age you will need to Google that). I was nine years old.

Thirty years (of hurt) on from that final, there was a knock at my front door. It was a surreal experience to see Geoff Hurst standing on my doorstep and even more bizarre as he went to one end of my front room and stood behind the settee. I went to the other end and sat on a chair. Geoff, England's World Cup hat-trick hero, had come to my house to rehearse his after-dinner speech. The settee acted as a makeshift top table. I was the only member of his audience.

His performance began. "I was at Paddington station one day and a chap came running up to me and said, 'Geoff, Geoff, I've been waiting 20 years to meet you, I know exactly where I was that day in 1966 when you scored your hat-trick.' 'Where was that?' asked Geoff. 'Pentonville prison,' replied the man. 'We were so happy we smashed the cell up.'"

I had written some of Geoff's script and I helped him with his presentation, but he quickly became a natural performer.

Another of Geoff's stories provides a fascinating insight into how the manager, Alf Ramsey, made sure his players never became complacent. In one England match Hurst played in, after the World Cup final, the players returned to the team hotel.

▲ *Hat-trick hero Geoff Hurst became a natural performer off the pitch*

They said their goodbyes and Hurst turned to Ramsey and said: "See you next time Alf."

"Perhaps, Geoff, perhaps," replied Ramsey. Geoff said it was a comment that really made him think that, despite scoring a hat-trick, his place wasn't guaranteed.

Ramsey's starting salary as England manager was £4,500 a year rising to a maximum of £5,000. He also asked the Football Association to help him buy a house.

In the 1980s, and for many years afterwards, there was a huge circuit of sporting dinners. They were often in the north of England and held at working men's clubs. Many of the 1966 England team were regular performers. Unlike today's Premier League stars, who earn hundreds of thousands of pounds a month the "Boys of 66" supplemented their income by performing on the circuit, which is where I got to know them.

Sometimes they would do their own routines, on other occasions I would interview them and tee them up for their anecdotes. On stage one night I said to Jack Charlton: "Jack, how's your brother Bobby?" Bobby could sometimes be very serious and he didn't smile very often. "Not great" replied Jack. "Oh, why's that?" I enquired. "Well, he's now been banned from his local pub, the landlord said he didn't want him there during the happy hour."

Those England players were involved in English sport's greatest day but you would never have known. They didn't act like unapproachable superstars. If I left a message on their home answerphone they would call straight back. It was so different to the majority of football personalities I tried to interview in later years for the BBC.

It was a surreal experience to see Geoff Hurst standing on my doorstep

Some of the events I worked at with the 1966 team were for amateur football clubs. We would be part of the entertainment alongside a tribute act, or a local comedian. The evening would sometimes start with a game of bingo. One dinner was very different. I was asked by the Institute of Directors to host a show and book as many of the England team as possible for a corporate lunch in London. I waited in the green room and they started filling in. It was like being in a dream and I imagined I was in the Wembley dressing room. In they trooped: George Cohen, Ray Wilson, Nobby Stiles, Hurst, Roger Hunt, Alan Ball, Martin Peters, Bobby and Jack Charlton, and for good measure BBC TV's Kenneth Wolstenholme, who delivered the greatest commentary line in the history of sports broadcasting.

Stiles was a great raconteur. One of his favourite anecdotes was based around the game England played against Argentina in the quarter-final. Before the match, Nobby, the hard man of the team, was taken to one side by Ramsey. "Nobby, Argentina's best player is Antonio Rattín, I want you to mark Rattín," said Ramsey. After a perfectly timed pause Nobby delivered the punchline: "Alf, do you want me to mark him for the match or for his entire life?"

It was a story that brought the house down.

In 1982 I was asked by Ian Thomas, my editor at BBC Radio Sport, to meet Ramsey at Liverpool Street station. Ramsey had been booked by the BBC to give his reaction to the draw for the 1982 World Cup finals. He immediately reminded me of Captain Mainwaring from Dad's Army. He spoke with a posh voice and came across as a very serious man. I was just 24 years old, and I couldn't believe my luck.

These were very different times. I still find it incredible that, on the morning of the 1966 final, Peters told me that, "time seemed to be dragging" so some of the players went shopping on Hendon's high street. And after England's win at Wembley the FA arranged an evening banquet for the players but, astonishingly, their wives were not invited. The players were very angry and when the dinner finished Hurst told me that he and several of the other players and their wives headed to Danny La Rue's cabaret club.

How times have changed and how lucky was I knowing the 1966 team? They were humble and really fun to be with and I still find it incredible that I spent so many great times with them.

Garry Richardson presents a special 1966 World Cup anniversary programme on Boom Radio tonight at 8pm

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City leading opposition to £1.5bn EFL funding plan

Matt Hughes

Manchester City are leading the opposition to the Premier League's plans to offer £1.5bn to the English Football League in a landmark financial settlement which will be discussed at a meeting of the 20 clubs today.

The Premier League wants to put its proposed offer, which would be spread over 10 years, to a vote in the hope of getting the matter resolved before the start of the season, but City are understood to have come up with a counterproposal amid concerns about how the package will be funded.

A number of City's misgivings are shared by other members of the so-called big six, who will be asked to pay more than other Premier League clubs towards the New Deal for Football, but it is unclear how many of them are prepared to back their rivals.

City remain short of allies within the top flight as they wait for the much-anticipated judgment of an independent tribunal after being charged with 115 breaches of financial fair play rules, despite settling a long-running legal dispute with the Premier League over its associated party transaction rules last year.

The Guardian has learned that City irritated several clubs by submitting a series of late amendments to proposed rule changes before the Premier League's annual general meeting in June, which were defeated by 19 votes to one.

City and other big clubs are understood to be unhappy with the proposal to fund the financial redistribution package by increasing the levy on transfer fees from 4% to 6%, which would leave the bigger spending clubs with a large bill. The Premier League will only ballot clubs today if it is confident of getting the 14 votes required for the proposal to pass, with sources describing executives as cautiously optimistic despite facing some opposition.

At an average of £150m a year, the Premier League's proposed contribution has not altered significantly since a similar offer of £750m over five years was put forward in September 2023, although it has doubled the length of the deal.

If approved by the clubs and accepted by the EFL an initial payment of £100m would be made this season, with larger contributions to be made in subsequent years until the 2035-36 season.

It is unclear whether the EFL would accept the Premier League's first offer however, with its chair, Rick Parry, believed to be holding out for a bigger deal.

If approved the EFL would allocate 80% of the New Deal to the Championship clubs, 12% to League One and 8% to League Two.

City and the Premier League declined to comment.

Manchester City are concerned with how the package will be financed

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Liverpool prepare Barcola bid but PSG want British record fee

Andy Hunter
New York

Liverpool are preparing an opening offer for Bradley Barcola after talks with the Paris Saint-Germain forward's representatives.

Barcola is a leading target for Liverpool as they look to add a proven winger to Andoni Iraola's squad before the new season. Yan Diomande had been wanted but is likely to join Real Madrid after PSG pulled out of a deal for the RB Leipzig winger.

PSG have placed a value in the region of £145m on Barcola, which would represent a British record sum. He has two years left on his contract with the European champions but is believed to have turned down the offer of an extension, having fallen down the pecking order in Luis Enrique's gifted team.

Liverpool have been exploring whether the 23-year-old is open to leaving PSG for Anfield. Having received encouragement that he wants to move to the Premier League, Liverpool are expected to bid for the France international in the coming days. Whether they are prepared to meet PSG's valuation remains to be seen, but the club will attempt to make Barcola their statement signing of the summer.

Liverpool have signed the versatile forward Víctor Muñoz from Osasuna this summer and finalised Jérémy Jacquet's transfer from Rennes for an initial £55m, but are looking to strengthen further in attack and defence, with Iraola concerned about his defensive options in particular.

▲ *PSG have placed a value in the region of £145m on Bradley Barcola*

Comment
Nick Ames

Uefa has to show backbone: concrete action can make Fifa's World Cup plans untenable

As the World Cup neared its conclusion, one leading figure in European football pondered how Gianni Infantino might attempt to rinse away the damaging stain of the Folarin Balogun scandal. It all came down to money. "He will just announce more funds for everyone," was the gist, although the tournament passed without any explanation of how Fifa would carve up its record $15bn (£11.2bn) haul.

That was the tip of the iceberg. Infantino's plan to sell chunks of the World Cup to private investors, announced on Tuesday, nine days after the final, has sent shock waves around the sport and left senior personnel scrambling. There is little time for a coordinated response given Fifa, at the height of what passes for football's holiday period, has given FAs until 19 September to decide whether to accept the initial $20m payment that would effectively count as endorsement of the new scheme.

The reaction must come quickly. Perhaps, when Uefa assesses its next move, it will look back to 2021 and remember the credit it happily banked in blocking the proposed European Super League. Fifa's plan, which could allow private investors a say in how and when its tournaments are run, is potentially more seismic and global in scale. If football's future has been on a ticking clock under Infantino, the time is one minute to midnight.

Uefa's speed in responding to the plan was of a piece with its renewed appetite, honed over a number of run-ins over the past 15 months, to stick the boot into Fifa. "This crosses a line that football's governing institutions should never cross," it said, although anyone feeling a sense of deja vu needed only to scroll back three weeks. On 6 July, another Uefa statement said the shelving of Balogun's suspension "crossed a red line". These are strong, accurate words, but they can be wielded only so many times.

Infantino can rush his proposals through by counting on votes from the overwhelming number of FAs, primarily based outside Europe, who pledge fealty to his administration. But a show of backbone from football's most powerful continent, a sporting behemoth that has eaten up any competition on the pitch and through the financial clout of its institutions, would be a major blow to Fifa. It would only take concrete action from a few of Europe's major nations, with their governments in lockstep, to render any plan to sell off football's crown jewels untenable.

This is a moment to remember that, as the Guardian revealed in mid-July, more than 200 of Fifa's 211 members have already submitted letters in support of his candidacy for re-election early next year. Most of those resisting significant pressure to offer backing are from Europe, with Germany the highest-profile holdout. But England's FA, which is hoping to rubber-stamp its hosting of the 2035 Women's World Cup, was quick to offer its endorsement well before this summer.

> *There is no time to play the long game when Infantino plans to carve up football's future*

Then there are cases such as Finland, whose FA president, Ari Lahti, said in June that his country aimed "not to be an eyesore" by refusing to back Infantino. It is a common stance, even among federations who are vocal in private about their disgust for Fifa's trampling over norms and proximity to the Donald Trump administration. Countries of all sizes have a duty to put the beauty contest on hold.

Any talk of boycotting future World Cups, which would surely have to include the women's edition in Brazil next year, is complicated by a section of Fifa's statutes that says its members are obliged to take part in its competitions. The only way to avoid financially prohibitive sanctions may be to threaten the most radical step of all: a withdrawal from Fifa and the creation of a new governance model for football.

Uefa, led by Aleksander Ceferin, responded quickly to Fifa's proposal

Uefa's position may be made trickier by its close relationship to the thus far taciturn European Football Clubs (EFC), which would like to set up a joint venture with Fifa to run the Club World Cup. EFC and Uefa already run a joint venture, UC3, that operates the commercial aspect of Uefa competitions, but one of the key differences from Fifa's proposal is that it does not involve private capital.

Somehow, everyone must be corralled together if Infantino is to be tackled. Another way would be to remove some wind from Infantino's sails by putting up a serious electoral opponent. After the Balogun affair, conversations with figures at all levels of the sport speculated whether Uefa might endorse its own candidate to run for the Fifa presidency in March. Consensus suggested it would be too soon; that this will be a period of positioning for 2031 when, according to Fifa's current rules, Infantino must stand aside.

But there is no time to play a long game when Infantino plans to carve up football's future among private interests in rapid order. Nor is there the opportunity to wait for any European Commission response to the complaint by FifPro, the global players' union, and the European Leagues organisation about Fifa's grip on the international match calendar, which was lodged in October 2024. A favourable outcome could place obstacles in front of any plans by Fifa, or its friends in private investment, to expand its tournaments, but no resolution appears in sight.

Uefa and Europe must take a lead and reject the status quo. Doing so might reveal friends in unexpected places. There are certainly countries in Asia, among other confederations, that would be open to clear suggestions of a better path. The fear is that a rush of nebulous statements such as that by the Danish FA, which responded to Infantino's plan by emphasising the need to "gain a complete understanding of the proposal and the process behind it" will result in nothing bar the standard procrastination and tacit acceptance.

Bravery and sturdy spines are required now, more than ever, if football is to survive in anything resembling its present form.

Infantino's thirst for expansion was clear right from the start

Fifa's plans to sell a share of the World Cup's commercial rights are latest in a long line of presidential power moves

Paul MacInnes

In hindsight, it was all in the open from the very off. When Gianni Infantino was first elected as president of Fifa in 2016 it was something of a shock victory and prompted hope for progress after the dark days of Sepp Blatter. Infantino had promised to restore "the image of Fifa", but also anticipated that "everyone in the world will applaud us". He promised accountability and transparency, but the core message to his electorate was to expect a "very significant increase" in funding. Just as a side note, there were also mutterings about him spending too much time on private jets.

Back then, Infantino was described as being a typical Swiss bureaucrat, but no one would make that comparison now. Leaders within football instead prefer comments such as "he thinks he's running a nation state". This feels particularly pertinent in the week Fifa announced without consultation plans to sell a share of the World Cup's commercial rights to outside investors. But Infantino's desire to grow both professional football and the revenues it creates has always been central to his pitch. The longer his time as president has gone on, the more wedded to this vision he has been.

Infantino first proposed expanding the size of the World Cup for the first time in 2016 and also raised the possibility of an enhanced version of the Club World

◀ *Gianni Infantino's close relationship with Donald Trump may end up extracting a heavy price*
IAN MACNICOL/ GETTY IMAGES

Cup. In 2018, he added the idea of a global Nations League and looked to create a new corporate vehicle to deliver it, funded by outside investment, but the plan was ultimately abandoned under pressure. It was also confirmed in 2017 that the World Cup would expand to 48 teams for the 2026 tournament. In 2021 it was reported that the 12 Super League clubs had expected Fifa to endorse them in their breakaway, before it was ultimately abandoned under pressure. At the end of that year, Infantino announced plans to make the World Cup biennial.

It goes on from there, with an even faster pace of activity and proposed innovation detectable after football emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic with substantial financial losses (which Fifa sought to plug in part with funds from its Forward Programme). There was the launch of the 32-team Club World Cup and immediate discussion of its expansion, the sudden and uncontested awarding of the 2034 World Cup to Saudi Arabia, the spread of the 2030 World Cup to take place in three continents and six host countries, and the possibility that tournament could again be expanded, to take in 64 national teams. Mandatory hydration breaks were an idea taken up at the end of last year.

A question regularly asked by football's decision-makers is: what is eating Infantino? What is it that drives his constant appetite for expansion? The most commonly made argument is patronage; that the money raised from expanded competition - and redistributed to member associations - ensures a supportive electorate when it comes time to renew your mandate (Infantino has, of course, changed the rules on how long a Fifa president can serve since coming to power). But Infantino has already in effect trebled Fifa's revenues since becoming president - is that not enough to earn support? And even with a new rulebook, Infantino's all-but-confirmed third full term will be his last.

The specific nature of his latest plan has generated another possible explanation: that Infantino is expanding Fifa's reach in order to create a sinecure on his departure. Reports in the Times suggested that Infantino could become CEO of the new venture once he leaves the presidency, and would receive remuneration more befitting of a corporate leader than the boss of an NGO. Fifa has denied that any such discussions have taken place but, even if a new lucrative role does come to pass, again it doesn't seem quite enough to explain all the shenanigans that have gone before.

A third, more prosaic argument, but one increasingly hard to dismiss, is that Infantino is simply in thrall to status and power. The Swiss-Italian kid growing up working-class in affluent Switzerland, being bullied for his ginger hair, is now at the top table. As an adult he has consistently shown an appetite for the high life and for associating with celebrities (alongside the private jets, he drafted in a dozen former professionals, nowadays known as Fifa Legends, to endorse his 2016 candidacy). Since becoming Fifa president his focus has shifted to consorting with world leaders, while mimicking their behaviours. His relations with Vladimir Putin, the emir of Qatar, the crown prince of Saudi Arabia and, ultimately, the US president, Donald Trump, have shown Infantino in a new context, a far grander one.

His new status has given Infantino more power, or at least the perception of it, and he has been able to force through any number of changes without effective pushback from inside Fifa or the game more broadly. But political alliances are often unstable and commonly transactional. The risk is that they can extract a heavy price and one senior football figure described the new commercial plan as being not Infantino's ambition at all. "Gianni has got in way over his head with Trump," they said. "He [Trump] is now extracting his share of the World Cup rewards."

'Every decision must be guided by good governance'

➔ **Continued** *from back page*

endorsement and therefore remove the need for a vote.

"Today we have learned of Fifa's deadline to associations to support their proposals or have the one-off payout offer withdrawn," Uefa said. "This says everything you need to know about this plan. But having held discussions with many stakeholders across the game, Uefa knows there is significant and growing opposition to Fifa's scheme. Fifa cannot continue to use our sport to enrich themselves and their friends. We can grow the game correctly. It's time to prioritise associations, clubs, leagues, players and fans."

Uefa's second statement of condemnation followed a similarly strong intervention from Concacaf, which is particularly significant given the confederation has just hosted the most lucrative World Cup and covers the region that has brought the proposed new investment from the New York-based Thrive Eternal.

The Concacaf president, Victor Montagliani, was instrumental in the success of the US, Mexican and Canadian bid for the tournament, but along with the seven other Fifa vice-presidents and Fifa council members he was kept in the dark over the plans.

"Concacaf was only made aware of this matter through media reports and, subsequently, via a media release," Concacaf said. "We are deeply concerned by the lack of due process. We share the disappointment of many within our region and the game that this level of detail has been designed and shared publicly before any discussion with the relevant governance bodies and stakeholders has taken place."

The AFC issued a similar statement of disapproval, which significantly is understood to have the backing of the Saudi Arabian football federation, a close ally of Infantino and the host of the 2034 World Cup.

"The AFC was not consulted on the proposal and is disappointed that a matter of such significance entered the public domain before the AFC family had been afforded the opportunity to examine and discuss it through the appropriate and established governance channels," it said.

"While the AFC recognises the importance of exploring innovative approaches that can strengthen the future of global football, initiatives of this scale and consequence must be founded upon the principles of good governance, transparency and meaningful consultation."

Elite clubs also expressed their unhappiness, with the European Football Clubs organisation pointing out that Fifa had not consulted it despite the two bodies having signed a memorandum of understanding.

"As an institution that represents over 850 football clubs - whose member clubs, their players and communities are fundamental participants in football worldwide, not least in Fifa's competitions - it would be wholly appropriate for EFC to be fully consulted on a proposal of such magnitude," it said.

"EFC learned about this proposal in the same way as most global football stakeholders - without warning and through the media."

Three Argentina players and one coach charged

➔ **Continued** *from back page*

Andrew Giuliani, the head of the White House Fifa taskforce, defended Argentina's players, saying the US believed in free speech.

The incident was not the first time an Argentina team had expressed such sentiments. In 2014, Fifa fined Argentina £20,000 for a far larger banner held up by players before a friendly with Slovenia in La Plata.

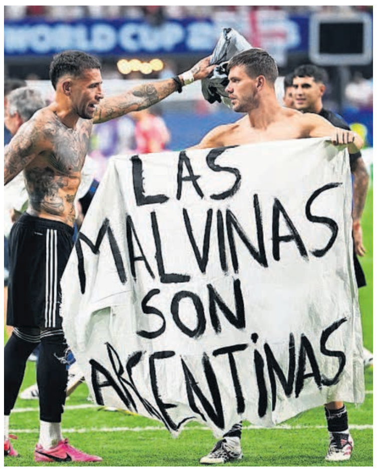
Fifa's full World Cup charge sheet against the Argentinian Football Association also includes "discriminatory chants and gestures, late kick-offs, failure to comply with match and security protocols, the display of inappropriate messages by the team and spectators and the throwing of objects by spectators in relation to several matches".

Several players are also under investigation in relation to the chaotic scenes that followed Argentina's 1-0 extra-time defeat by Spain in the final. As Spain attempted to celebrate, altercations broke out across the pitch at New York New Jersey Stadium.

The Argentina midfielder Leandro Paredes, who was seen wrestling Spain's Eric García to the ground, faces three counts of assault under the Fifa disciplinary code, while the defender Nahuel Molina faces two counts of assault (one completed and one attempted) and one count of unsporting behaviour.

The assistant coach, Roberto Ayala, faces one count of assault, and Thiago Almada, an unused substitute in the final, one count of unsporting behaviour. Spain's Gavi also faces an unsporting behaviour charge.

"In accordance with the Fifa disciplinary code, the respondents have now been provided with the opportunity to present their position, following which a decision will be issued by the Fifa disciplinary committee in due course," said Fifa.



▲ *Argentina's players displayed a Falklands banner after the semi-final*

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Sport

New dawn

England ready to name Fleming as Test coach

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Silver lining

Ramsay-Peaty helps medley relay team to second spot

Commonwealth Games *Page 38* →

Europe weighs up boycott

Uefa calls emergency meeting as opposition to Fifa sell-off grows

Matt Hughes
Nick Ames

Uefa has called an emergency meeting of its 55 members for this afternoon to discuss a coordinated response to Gianni Infantino's plan to sell off stakes in the World Cup to private investors. A European boycott of Fifa tournaments is among the options under consideration.

As the next major event in the Fifa calendar, a boycott of next year's Women's World Cup has been mentioned in preliminary discussions, although there would be a reluctance in some quarters to make the women's game suffer as a consequence of a protest against Fifa proposals that primarily revolve around monetising the men's World Cup and Club World Cup.

Uefa's initial condemnation of Fifa's plan to "sell the soul" of football has received strong backing from Concacaf - the North, Central American and Caribbean confederation - and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC). If their members follow their leads there should be sufficient votes to block the proposal.

Gianni Infantino's plan has drawn strong condemnation

Those three confederations make up 143 of the 211 Fifa members, but unanimity is not guaranteed, as was made clear when Czechia's football association became the first in Europe to back the plan.

Having received more than 200 letters of endorsement backing his re-election next year, Infantino is confident he has enough votes - although it is unclear whether the proposal requires a simple majority to be passed. Several sources have said that creating a new commercial entity - Fifa Forward Enterprise [FFE] - and selling a 20% stake to investors would necessitate a change of Fifa statutes, which requires a 75% majority that would be much harder to obtain.

Last night, Infantino released a video to address the backlash. "FFE is actually a proposal, an offer," he said. "It's part of a democratic process - a consultation process - and, above all, it is an opportunity but not an obligation. It is a golden opportunity to turbocharge the development of the game globally."

Earlier, Uefa redoubled its attack on Fifa by accusing the world governing body of "using our sport to enrich themselves and their friends" after it emerged that Infantino had presented members with a deadline of 19 September to decide whether to apply for an initial payment of $20m (£15m) from the proposed sell-off.

A further $20m for each association would also be made available at a later date, although it is unclear whether accepting the money would equate to a formal

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The Boys of 1966

60 years ago today and a world away

Garry Richardson recalls England's glory
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ALLSPORT HULTON GETTY/ALLSPORT

Argentina charged over banner and final chaos

John Ashdown

Fifa has opened disciplinary proceedings against Argentina over the Falkland Islands banner displayed after their World Cup semi-final win against England in Atlanta.

As Argentina celebrated reaching the final with their dramatic 2-1 victory, several players held a sign proclaiming "*Las Malvinas son Argentinas*" - the Malvinas are Argentinian - in reference to the British overseas territory in the south Atlantic.

The dispute over the islands, which have been ruled by Britain since 1833, is long running and led to a 74-day conflict in 1982, during which more than 900 people - 649 Argentinians and 255 Britons - lost their lives.

Fifa's disciplinary code prohibits "using a sports event for demonstrations of a non-sporting nature" and the banner prompted political debate on both sides of the Atlantic. A spokesperson for the then UK prime minister, Keir Starmer, said: "The World Cup might not be ours, but the Falkland Islands definitely are."

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Forty-five climate policies ditched while the world burns *Bill McGuire, page 3*
If my kids do opt for the hard-hat life, is that OK? *Emma Brockes, page 4*
Mike Salisbury, TV producer known for the Life wildlife series *Obituaries, page 6*

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Opinion and ideas

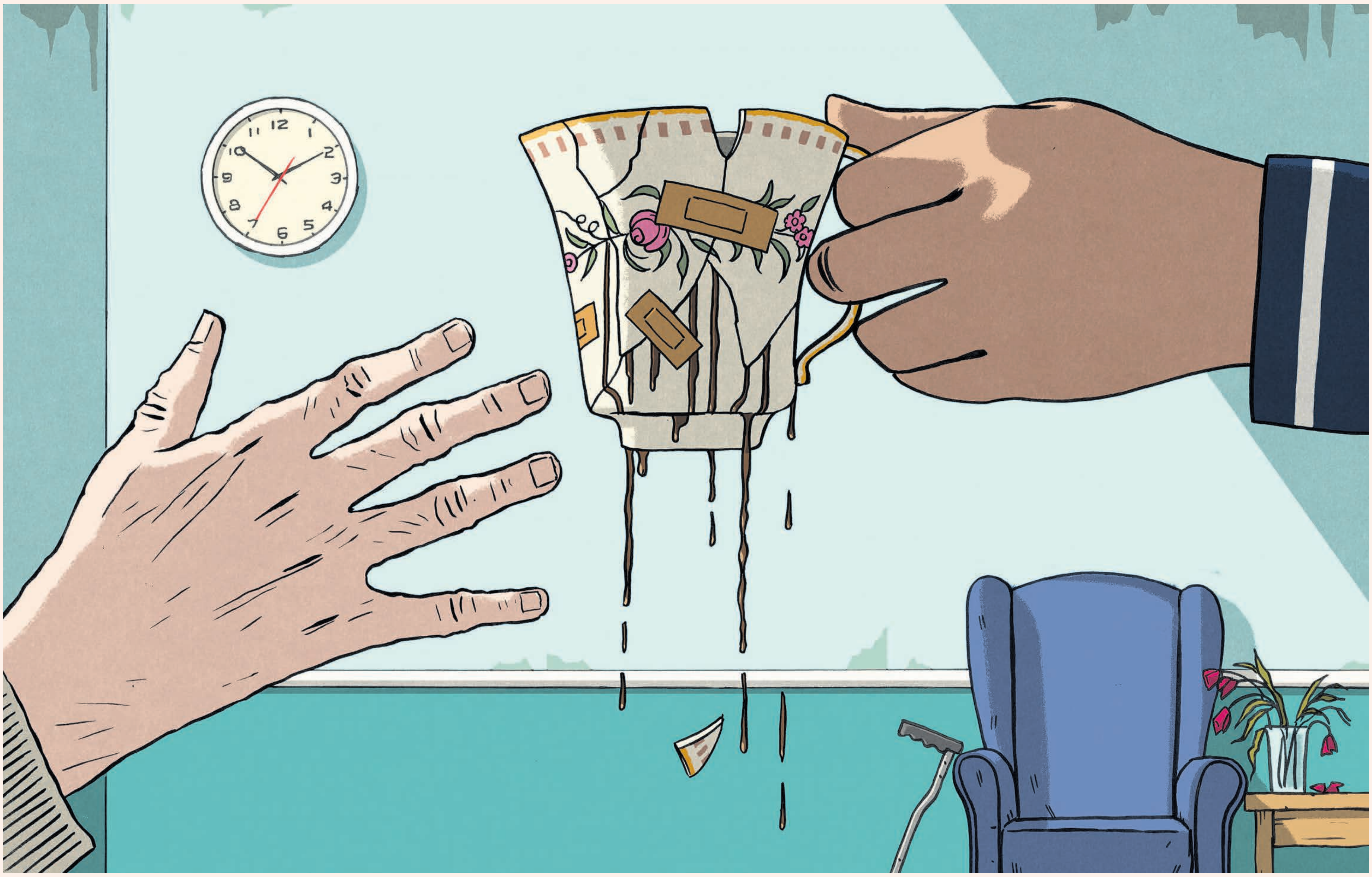

ILLUSTRATION: BILL BRAGG

This battle for social care will define us. And it must be won

Polly Toynbee

“People pleaser!” That’s the insult Andy Burnham’s enemies sneer at him. And yes, he will need all his mightiest people-pleasing talents to win over voters to contribute to a new national care service. Choosing this forever failed policy (22 major reviews over three decades) as his first great challenge is a remarkable act of bravery. No mere people pleaser would dare try it.

It will use up vast amounts of political capital to get a national care service off the ground. This is no grasp at low-hanging fruit, no search for a quick win. It’s a cause of deep conviction. In his speech from a north London care home, the prime minister told of his father with dementia, and of the struggle for families to get any help, the poor quality of much of it, the astronomical costs for some and the profiteering of private equity firms buying up care homes. That will have resonated with many, but his challenge now is to win the attention, hearts and minds of those who know nothing of social care.

A survey last year found 33% of people in England believed care was generally free at the point of need, like the NHS, and another 18% didn’t know whether it was. Many get a nasty shock when they need it for their family and find they must pay if they have savings above £23,250. Only 4% listed social care as a top priority for the country; its political salience is low because at any one time, few people are using it - and they put it out their minds afterwards. In England, this unseen service uses up a phenomenal 78% of local council funds: no wonder people think they get bad value for their council tax, as visible services keep shrinking to pay for it. Everything about it is broken.

People need to wake up to what confronts us. They need to know that the roulette wheel of fate decides which families are stricken by dementia: one in three people alive today will get this most dreaded of diseases. Some may live for years in a nursing home: one in seven will pay over £100,000 and some will have to sell the family home.

But still, this nation of gamblers shrugs. People bet that it will never happen to them; that when their time comes, they will just drop dead. Burnham rightly described the UK’s social care system as equally unfair as the US health system: it bankrupts some. Would people rather pay a defined amount or risk losing everything? It’s an insurance offer to protect against catastrophic loss.

➔

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This battle for social care will define us. And it must be won

Polly Toynbee

← Continued from front

Research by the Health Foundation has found public support for funding reform, but - here's the catch - only "once people understand the current system". As Louise Casey embarks on her Big Conversation on care, educating people about the system will be her primary task.

This is about better care, too. For-profit care is lower quality than voluntary, non-profit or local authority-run care services, the Blavatnik School of Government has found. This chaotic system includes 16,500 care homes: 85% for profit, many small family-run businesses and some private equity big chains that will not be part of the new care service.

Why do we endure this barely regulated, barely inspected patchwork of confusion? This was another disastrous Margaret Thatcher privatisation, of the kind Burnham intents to repair. After a 1988 report by the supermarket executive Roy Griffiths, Thatcher effectively ordered councils to close their own homes and services, outsourcing them to the private sector, and closed NHS geriatric care wards. Crafting a new national care service out of all this would be the hardest of all in-sourcing tasks.

This week, the prime minister warned the NHS could collapse unless social care is repaired. Last month, about 13,600 beds were occupied by people who were there only for lack of social care elsewhere, and delayed discharges cost the NHS £2.7bn last year. Burnham talks of integrating NHS and social care, with a workforce eventually on the same pay and with the same career progression.

Will people agree to pay up? There are signs they will: when Boris Johnson proposed a care levy, it was surprisingly popular. But it was abolished by Kwasi Kwarteng before it could be implemented. Which was just as well, because the plan added 1.25 percentage points to employee and employer national insurance. That meant workers, not pensioners, would pay. No extra tax would fall on dividends or other unearned income that doesn't attract NI contributions.

Whatever system emerges, one principle must be that not a penny more is paid by the young for the old. Pensioners in the UK are the least likely group to be in poverty (though, of course, some are). They generally have the most wealth and property, alongside final salary and triple-locked pensions. They are the overwhelming beneficiaries of the NHS. It's no cliche to say the young are the future, so they must come first, in better early-years education, holiday childcare and schools with a wider technical, arts, drama, sports and design curriculum, while further education gets the funding and status it needs. The old must pay for the old, in one way or another.

This is a minefield. The politics of social care are fraught beyond all the other great problems Burnham could have chosen at the start. But the tone of his speech suggests the new prime minister really may lift this as a national priority. The wreckers in the Tory and Reform parties may find themselves wrong-footed and, yet again, out of tune with the public mood.

When Burnham says we need "a different kind of politics: problem-solving, not point-scoring", some old hands sigh and say: "Good luck with that!" But Burnham may strike a chord. A public grown hostile to politics may see through Kemi Badenoch's deliberately impossible conditions for consensus agreement, as she cynically and childishly demands no borrowing, no taxes and no taking from "those who have made provisions and saved up over the course of their lives". They know someone must pay, and that includes those lucky enough to have "made provisions".

It has never been the right time to brave social care reform. But it may be now, with a leader driven by personal belief, in his early stages, when he still has substantial amounts of political capital. He has grasped the nettle: will society, politics and the media? If not now, when?

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'Comment is free... but facts are sacred' CP Scott

Social care

A national conversation about reform has to include honesty around tax rises

Andy Burnham is well qualified to speak on the subject of what can go wrong with social care policy. As health secretary in 2010, he proposed reforms to be funded by a 10% inheritance levy. This was called a "death tax" by the opposition. It was never introduced.

Where Mr Burnham failed, none have subsequently succeeded. David Cameron accepted the recommendations of the 2011 Dilnot commission, which proposed a cap on the amount any individual would pay for care, but the cost to the exchequer thwarted implementation. Theresa May suggested plugging the money gap with a revised means test and no individual cap. This was branded a "dementia tax" by opponents and never saw the light of day.

Boris Johnson planned a "health and social care levy" alongside a means test. That fell foul of the Tories' ideological allergy to tax rises. Labour's 2024 election manifesto promised a "national care service". Sir Keir Starmer then commissioned a review, led by Louise Casey, to explore reform options and report back in 2028, a timetable that made change before the next general election unlikely.

Mr Burnham has retrieved the Casey review from the long grass. It will now report next year. The prime minister has also called for a "national conversation" with a view to finding cross-party consensus on social care in England. He has invited the leaders of the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives (but notably not Reform UK or the Greens) for talks. Dame Louise will oversee a wider consultation exercise, taking views from the public. Lessons can also be learned from Scotland and Wales, with their devolved care models. This process is intended, in the prime minister's words, to enable "more problem solving, less point-scoring" in the politics of social care.

The idea is laudable. In his speech yesterday, Mr Burnham was eloquent on the subject of what has to change in Westminster culture: the need to foster a climate where hard issues might be debated in good faith, without long-term national interests being sabotaged for short-term partisan advantage.

The prime minister was also refreshingly generous in his praise for care workers, recognising the technical and emotional challenges they meet for inadequate reward. He is right to say that they deserve higher wages and to make explicit the debt that all of Britain owes to a section of the labour force that is substantially staffed by immigrants.

Generosity of spirit is easier to dispense than money. Mr Burnham is new enough to Downing Street that he can afford to set out broad principles without being pinned down to specifics. That privilege will not last long. He admits that a commitment to grapple with an issue that is notoriously destructive of political capital is a gamble. Cross-party consensus will remain elusive if any revenue-raising mechanism is liable to be denounced as an unconscionable tax raid. The Conservatives and Reform UK, forgoing the opportunity to appear broad-minded, have already indicated that this is their position.

Mr Burnham has enough Labour MPs to enact change without opposition support. Reforms, and the contributions that pay for them within the fiscal rules, will form the basis for a future consensus if enough voters are persuaded they are necessary and fair. There is a long road to travel before that campaign begins, but the prime minister's first steps are the right ones.

World Cup

Gianni Infantino's plans for a sell-off should be seen as a red-card offence

Like a sporting Dr Pangloss, Fifa's president, Gianni Infantino, would like to persuade football followers that they are living in the best of all possible worlds. Maddeningly for him, many disagree. On Monday, Mr Infantino published a 15-page Instagram rant in which he bemoaned the "hate and false rumours" in circulation during the recent men's World Cup. White House interference over a crucial refereeing decision, prohibitive ticket prices, unnecessary but lucrative hydration breaks; it was all, as his best friend in politics, Donald Trump, would say, "fake news".

But where the president of world football's governing body sees haters, others see lovers of the game rightly concerned over where he is taking it. On Tuesday, Fifa confirmed that it hopes to sell stakes in the World Cup and other tournaments to private investors who may include Joshua Kushner, the brother of Mr Trump's son-in-law Jared. The investors would buy into a new $20bn company, Fifa Forward Enterprise, which would sell all of Fifa's commercial rights, including ticketing, and take charge of "operational delivery" of World Cups.

Members of the extended Trump family do not generally contemplate business ventures out of a desire to spread "joy and happiness" in the world (which the egregious Mr Infantino presents as his mission). If the plans go ahead - sweetened by offers of a $30m windfall for national associations - investors' desires to maximise revenues would undoubtedly accelerate the hyper-monetisation of the World Cup that is already taking place.

Almost certainly there would be pressure for more frequent and bigger tournaments at both club and national level, distorting the international game's calendar to the detriment of domestic leagues. Mr Infantino has already indicated that he would look favourably on such an expansion, despite objections from bodies such as Uefa, European football's governing body. Innovations such as the widely loathed hydration breaks - which by breaking games up into four quarters, US-style, allowed extra advertising slots - would no doubt proliferate.

The prospect revives fears generated by the failed European Super League proposals, which were furiously opposed by football supporters in 2021. During this summer's World Cup in the US, Mr Kushner and others will have seen at first-hand the vast commercial possibilities of an event that unites a global audience in an age of fragmented media. As the highest-level steward of the game, Fifa's primary job is to protect football from forces that might be interested in exploiting its appeal by selling its soul; instead, under Mr Infantino, it appears happy to do their job for them.

Angry opposition to the plans from Uefa and Concacaf (the equivalent body for North and Central America) suggests that the governance of the game may be at a crossroads. Mr Infantino's tireless self-promotion, and shameless efforts to curry favour with the Trump administration, have long grated. But placing the planet's most-watched sporting competition at risk from predation by private capital is of a somewhat different order of magnitude.

The visionary creator of the World Cup, Jules Rimet, hoped that it would help foster unity and solidarity between nations. Mr Infantino routinely pays lip service to such ideals, and did so again in his Instagram screed. In reality, though, he is dragging the world's favourite sport further and further away from its roots, as he relentlessly follows the money wherever it leads.

Forty-five more climate policies ditched while the world burns

Bill McGuire

Such is the astonishing scale of the wildfires burning at the gates of Bordeaux and Madrid, that if they had happened 20, or - even 10 - years ago, they might well have shocked the world into taking action on the climate crisis. But like the proverbial frog in a pot of slowly heating water, we have become inured; not only to the ever more devastating impacts of climate breakdown, but also, increasingly, to the actions needed to bring global heating to heel.

Even as more than 35,000 wildfires rage across the surface of our world, and as we continue to rewind our planet's climate so it resembles hotter episodes from its distant past, governments and trading blocs are very deliberately turning away from climate action.

The latest evidence that we are not only doing too little but actually doing less as time goes by is provided by the climate action media platform, We Don't Have Time. It reported last week that the 12 months to July this year saw the reversal across the world of 45 climate policies. The retreat on climate action is global, but Europe - previously seen as a leader in emissions reductions - is in the vanguard, weakening measures across the board, including in the areas of carbon pricing, methane emissions and the phasing out of petrol and diesel vehicles.

This isn't yet an apocalyptic reversal of the majority of climate commitments, as the continuity of countless other climate policies testifies. We are, however, at an especially critical period: if we don't want backsliding on climate action to continue, we have to act now.

We Don't Have Time lays the blame squarely at the foot of lobbying by the fossil fuel sector and other industries antagonistic to climate action, making the point that as long as the usual suspects continue to make the most noise in the meetings where decisions are made, they will get what they want. What we have to do, then, is to make even more noise - on the streets, via the ballot box and in the media - putting pressure on politicians and governments so that they don't cave in to vested business interests.

We must force those in power to join the dots between the fires raging across Europe and the El Niño building in the Pacific, and the activities of the fossil fuel corporations and others who choose not to do so. But we need our own lobbyists too - those qualified and in positions to speak truth to power about the dire straits we are already in, who can add credence to the noisy debate. Cue the world's climate scientists. At this critical moment, the science has a duty to out-shout and out-shine corporate weasel words and government irresponsibility. The problem is that even now, at a time when the rate of global heating has doubled, this is just not happening.

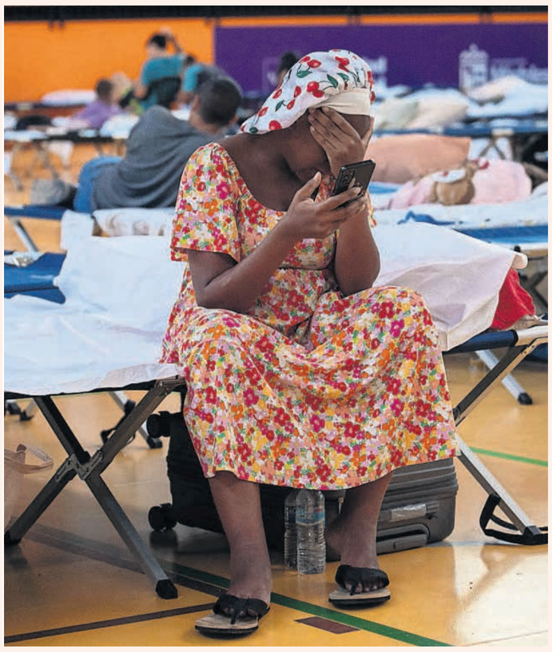
Sure, there are climate scientists out there telling it like it is, making a lot of noise and often putting their livelihoods and career prospects on the line, but they remain the exception rather than the rule. Far too many individuals, for one reason or another, still keep silent, heads below the parapet, fears and frets internalised.

In 2021, I wrote an open letter to all climate scientists, reminding them that they had a duty to speak out, to come down off the fence and to force those who need to know to listen to the truth. Sadly, five years on, little has changed. For far too many people, fears about funding, academic advancement, prestige, and the contempt or ridicule of colleagues, still trump speaking out.

With the heat continuing to ratchet up, it is clear this cannot go on. If we want to have any possibility of drowning out the bogus claptrap of those determined to prevent serious climate action, then climate scientists - all scientists for that matter - need to wake up now and make themselves heard.

Climate science is a vast tent that incorporates aspects of geology, chemistry, physics, oceanography, meteorology, economics, social science and many other fields, so that one source putting the number of climate scientists at 18,000 worldwide is almost certainly an underestimate. When it comes to scientists of every ilk, the global figure comes out at not far short of 10 million. Just imagine how much racket the scientific community could make if it spoke with the same voice - demanding the reinstatement of climate-friendly policies, arguing for more rapid emissions cuts, and at the same time overwhelming the perfidious calls for inertia from those lobbying for business as usual.

This may well be our last chance to turn things around; to help politicians grow the backbone they need to stand up to vested interests. At this crucial time every scientist needs to examine their conscience, take on board the reality that there will be no research grants on a dead planet - and act accordingly.



A wildfire near the town of Mirabel-et-Blacons in southeastern France on 28 July (above); evacuees from Spanish wildfires shelter in a Madrid sports centre

PHOTOGRAPHS: MOHAMAD SALAHELDIN/ANADOLU/GETTY IMAGES; JUAN CARLOS LUCAS/ZUMA PRESSWIRE/SHUTTERSTOCK

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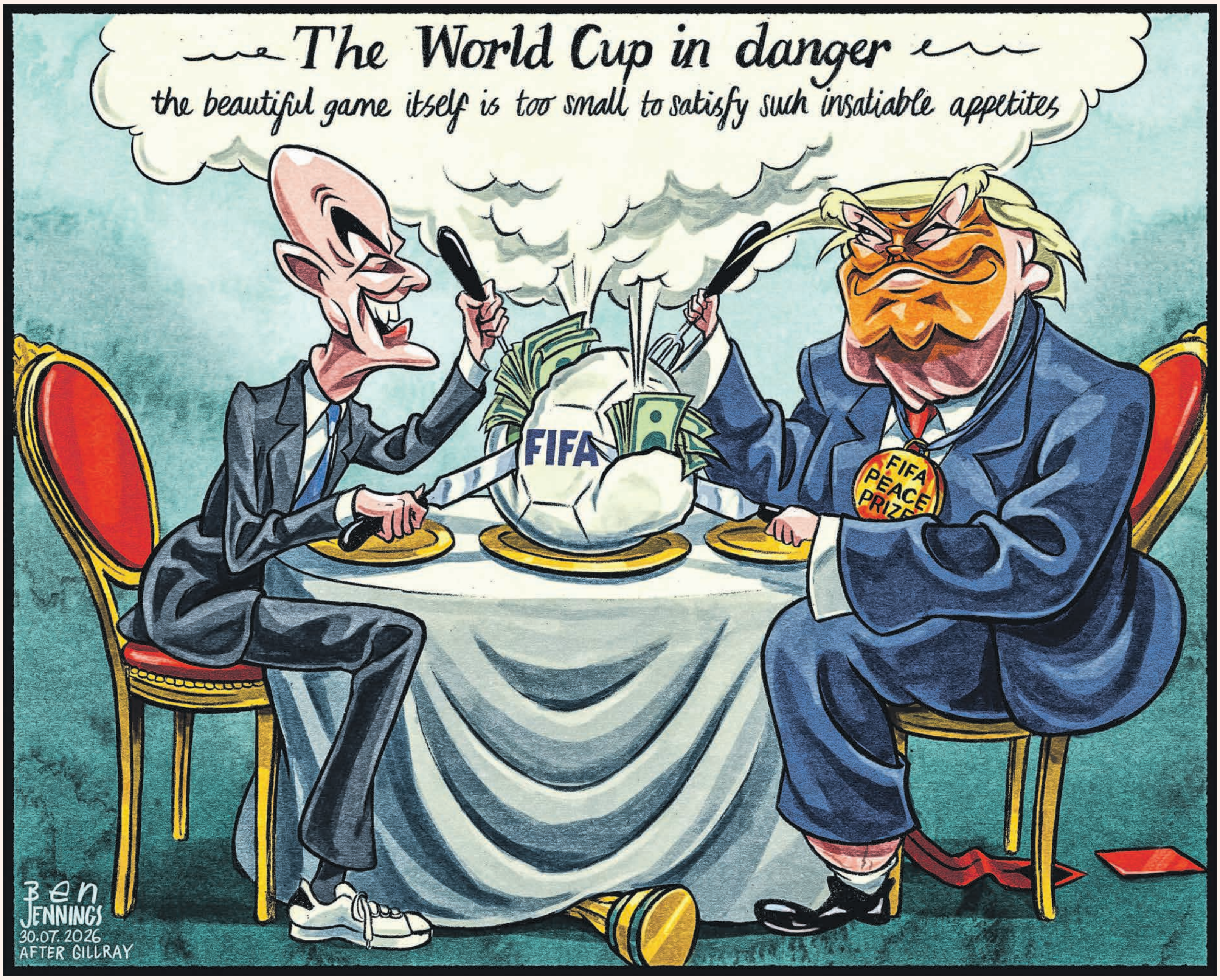
The World Cup in danger
the beautiful game itself is too small to satisfy such insatiable appetites
FIFA
FIFA PEACE PRIZE
Ben Jennings
30.07.2026
AFTER GILLRAY

BEN JENNINGS

If my kids opt for the hard-hat life, is that OK?

Emma Brockes

Lately I've been having a conversation with friends that a few years ago would've been unthinkable. Partly, this is because of how sheltered we all tend to be when trying to imagine our kids' lives running on different tracks to our own. But it's also about the world changing. A brilliant young person I know left school, took up an internship, turned it into a job and now she's in her early 20s with no debt and a great position at a big fashion house. "Maybe I won't go to university, either," said one of my kids, eyeing me for a reaction, while I nodded thoughtfully and tried to ride out the panic.

Andy Burnham's announcement this week that university shouldn't be the single, aspirational goal of all young people is perfectly timed and sensibly presented and shouldn't sound as radical as it does. It is, of course, a correction to existing norms that university-for-all is a proper national goal and the only personal determinant of ambition and success. By contrast, Burnham said on Tuesday, this country should "value the hard hat every bit as much as the graduation cap" as he spoke about tailoring technical and vocational training to meet local job needs and tackle youth unemployment.

Evidence suggests that a culture shift is already under way and that Burnham is simply validating an existing trend. I'm in the US at the moment, where the cost-reward ratio of going to college is so out of whack that student numbers have been dropping for years. Smart people on podcasts direct young people towards their in-state universities, which charge a fraction of the cost of the prestigious private ones (not the Ivy Leagues, so much, which can afford to subsidise any family making less than $400,000 a year, but the smaller, boutique liberal arts colleges that charge as much as $80,000 in annual tuition).

In the UK, too, for the last two years, university numbers have dipped slightly. This is partly a result of changing demographics - smaller families mean a smaller supply of school-leaving 18-year-olds - and partly to do with the cost.

The question is what this is doing to perceptions about the usefulness or otherwise of going to college, which, as we know, isn't just about earning potential. In both the US and the UK, being a graduate still delivers average median earnings that are higher than the earnings of non-graduates. But while middle-class people make jokes about how their plumbers probably earn more than they do, the fact remains that it is the other stuff - the cultural and social capital of going to college - that underscores this particular bias.

So it is that, while "low-value" degrees have been the target of derision ever since media studies became a thing in the 90s, when you dig down into why people want their kids to go to university, it is as much to do with social benefits as academic attainment. When will they meet the friends who will stay with them and godparent their children if not while sitting around watching mid-morning telly for three years as they slowly mature into adults? Are those friendships worth 10 grand a year? How, exactly, do you put a value on the non-academic stuff? I always think of a thing Don DeLillo said once about honouring a need to "drink coffee and look at the world" for a space of years, something that in the current economic climate sounds like a preposterous indulgence. And yet, for lots of 18-year-olds, it remains a valuable exercise.

But not all of them. Surely the main takeaway from Burnham's speech is a reminder that there is more than one way of doing things. You can go to college, or not go to college, or go at 35 not 18, and all those things should be regarded as equal. Meanwhile, the whole conversation around college is just part of a larger one about changing work patterns in which, on the evidence so far, gen Z are proving reluctant to repeat the experience of their parents' generation by taking up office jobs - with pushback from gen X, who feel they came of age in office structures that taught them all sorts of useful things, such as how to work alongside people they found basically unbearable.

We all bring biases to the question of how to live life. I went to university and want my kids to do the same. My mum would've loved to have gone to university but had to leave school at 16 and I'm sure that's in the mix, too. But when the question of college education came up in our house, I tried hard to take myself off generational autopilot, stop being so hidebound by precedent, and properly consider the alternative.

Letters

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Established 1906

Country diary

Dungeon Lane, Liverpool

Earlier this year, Paul McCartney released an album called The Boys of Dungeon Lane. Among the unashamed nostalgia is a wistful track, Days We Left Behind, which evokes memories of his visits to the Mersey shore with George Harrison and friends. Young Paul was, it turns out, a keen birdwatcher.

Perhaps inevitably, the album has brought crowds of tourists to photograph the sign. The Speke end of the lane where they mostly gather is uninspiring, bounded by remnants of a demolished pub, a solar farm and an electricity substation.

The southern end of Dungeon Lane is where Paul would have gone with his binoculars. This section leads down to Dungeon Bay and Oglet Shore, important sites for birds and wildlife, then as now. The coast may be more eroded, but Paul would still recognise it.

The middle of the lane was cut off a few years ago by Liverpool John Lennon airport, but more curious visitors can still reach the shore via a slight detour. Here is coastal beauty. July is the quiet month for birds, but goldfinches, linnets and common whitethroats call mutedly. Dense bramble guards the lane, with fecund banks of early ripeness born of this summer's heat dome. Red soldier beetles explore wild carrot blooms, while ragwort and buddleia host cinnabar moth caterpillars and many butterflies.

Other features point to a history before the Beatles. The second world war stone pyramids were tank traps to repel any invading enemy. A sandstone wall, adjacent to the shore, is the only evidence of a once thriving salt industry. A salt refinery was built here in the late 17th century, and the wall may be the remains of a sandstone quay. Closer inspection shows old graffiti names and initials.

Two girls are sitting on the wall gazing across the Mersey (perhaps young Paul once did the same, watching for waders). We chat briefly; they speak of its beauty, vowing to return. Walking back, a young man approaches. He reflects on when he cycled down Dungeon Lane as a child. The McCartney tourists, he says, are visiting the "wrong" part of the lane. "They should come down here instead."

Jennifer Jones

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The feelgood factor of Burnham's bus fare cap

Jonathan Freedland recounts how when he was 14 years old, Greater London council, led by Ken Livingstone, reduced child fares on the buses to 5p in a scheme called Fares Fair (Scoff at his bus fares if you like - the PM knows what he's doing, 25 July). In 1950s Liverpool, the corporation had a scheme for schoolchildren in the holidays whereby they could buy a "penny return" to anywhere on the tram network. You could, for example, travel from the Pier Head by the Mersey on the number 10 tram to Prescot, almost 10 miles inland, and back again. Or you could use your ticket to transfer from your first destination to a different one rather than using it as a return. Sadly the last tram ran in 1957.

I remember on one occasion being on the tram when a rather tall boy asked for a penny return. The conductor obviously suspected that he was over the age limit. He gave him his ticket, but asked him: "Why didn't you bring the missis?" And by the way, this was of course the old penny, of which there were 240 to the pound sterling.

Joe Cocker
Leominster, Herefordshire

● Jonathan Freedland is admiring of leaders who make the big statement that defines their term. Those he mentions are a mixed bag. Nye Bevan was right with the NHS, as was Harold Wilson with the Open University, but was Margaret Thatcher with right to buy? All that happened was house price inflation, unfair property windfalls and many of those properties ending up in the avaricious hands of private landlords.

As for Gordon Brown's Bank of England independence, all that happened was that monetary policy and fiscal policy got separated into ghettoes with no effect on boom or bust. In the 10 years from 1997 to 2007, high Bank rates had no effect in damping down the party, while in the decade from 2010 to Covid, the Bank rate at 0.5% or lower had absolutely no effect in getting the economy anywhere near to normal levels of growth. Might it be a better idea if politicians had a longer think about their headline policies? Headlines one day, fish and chip wrappers the next.

David Redshaw
Saltdean, East Sussex

● Andy Burnham's bus fare cap rang a bell for me: the South Yorkshire equivalent was reduced fares to 10p for adults and 2p for children in the early 1980s. Little things have long shadows: in Sheffield, almost half a century later, it is still mentioned every time we bemoan the parlous, life-limiting, economy-harming state of the privatised buses. Small changes to conserve small change could amount to a radical shift of gear. Hold tight, please.

Robin Hughes
Sheffield

● In the late 1940s and 50s, a return bus ticket from Thorne to Doncaster in South Yorkshire, 10 miles each way, was one shilling and 10 old pence. My dad always said we had the cheapest fares in England. This made us feel travel was affordable and encouraged us to go places. We also went to Doncaster, our nearest big town, more frequently, for shopping trips. Cheap public transport spreads the feelgood factor. Expensive transport equals stress and distrust of the provider. So well done, Andy Burnham.

Jennifer Kennerley
Norwich

● Dear Andy Burnham, please provide Shropshire with a comprehensive bus service so that residents can benefit from the £2 cap on bus fares.

Roz Conway
Shrewsbury, Shropshire

Shameful treatment of families in heatwave

How did London get here (Tenants fall ill in heat after air conditioning 'switched off', 28 July)? Your report says homeless families, including young children, were placed in a glass tower during a heatwave and told they could not use the building's air conditioning because it had "not been offered as an amenity". If that doesn't make every Londoner stop in disbelief, we've become dangerously desensitised. This is no longer a housing crisis, it is a crisis of basic human dignity.

London proudly markets itself as one of the world's greatest cities: a global financial capital overflowing with luxury developments, billion-pound property portfolios and record-breaking real estate values. Yet, in the shadow of that wealth, children are being expected to endure dangerously hot flats where the very system designed to make the building habitable is effectively treated as a luxury.

When a city reaches the point where vulnerable families are housed in buildings that become ovens, while the solution exists but is deemed off limits, something has gone profoundly wrong.

This isn't an administrative oversight. It is the triumph of bureaucracy over common sense and, ultimately, over compassion. Politicians have spent years telling us London is thriving. Thriving for whom? It certainly isn't thriving for the record number of families trapped in temporary accommodation or the children growing up without a stable home.

History teaches us that great cities are judged not by the height of their skyscrapers, but by how they treat those with the least power. On that measure, London should be deeply ashamed. A city where air conditioning exists but compassion is switched off is no longer a world-class city. It is simply a dystopia.

Fernando Quintana Marrero
London

Reclaiming your peace on WhatsApp

I read Polly Hudson's article (Have I been wrong about WhatsApp all this time?, 27 July) with interest, but I think blue ticks fell out of fashion for a simpler reason - they turned WhatsApp into a full-time job. In an era when so many of us are trying to reclaim a little time and attention from our screens, switching off "read" receipts gave people a small but meaningful sense of control.

Being permanently contactable is exhausting. Reading a message and replying to it are two different things, but blue ticks erased the gap between them. The moment they turned blue, an invisible countdown began. Switching them off was about reclaiming the radical idea that I can read your message now and come back to it later, because at the precise moment you texted I was probably trying to remember why I'd walked into the kitchen.

Tallis Morris
Bristol

● Polly Hudson's article describes how ramping up your privacy settings can involve switching off the blue ticks option on WhatsApp. I switched them off years ago for privacy reasons. It was too tempting to check if people had read your messages. If they had, how long did it take them to reply?

Worse still, messages not read meant you were definitely not in the cool club, which was depressing. Having blue ticks disabled on your WhatsApp means you can ping your messages out into the ether and, unless you get a reply, you have no idea who bothered to read them. Much better for your mental health and it saves a lot of time and energy.

Kim Ware
Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire

Corrections and clarifications

● **It was Matthew Ward who swam backstroke in Scotland's Commonwealth bronze medal-winning mixed 4x100m medley relay team, not "Katie Ward" as we misnamed him. And Angharad Evans, not "Kara Hanlon Evans", swam the breaststroke leg (Jersey boy Nowacki comes of age with swim triumph, 29 July, p42, late editions). Kara Hanlon is a Scottish swimmer who competed in the 2022 Commonwealth Games.**

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How Bill Oddie was a comfort to me

Sad to hear of Bill Oddie's death (Report, 28 July). He first grabbed my attention in I'm Sorry, I'll Read That Again, a 1960s radio show with fine comedic talent: John Cleese, Tim Brooke-Taylor, Graeme Garden, David Hatch, Jo Kendall. Bill's songs were always witty. I remember going to a recording of the show and watching him grapple with the line "He battled with the rollocks". To a 14-year-old that was hysterical. As a lifelong depressive, when I heard about Bill's own battle, I felt sympathy for him and comfort for myself.

Chris House
Hertford

● Regarding the best ice-creams, Lucy Knight awards 5/10 for flavour to the Marmite on toast creation (G2, 28 July). Surely in the case of Marmite, the only appropriate ratings are 10 or zero?

Adrian Brodkin
London

● Regarding Dr Terry Scragg's letter on obituaries (28 July), one of the most consistent words used to describe the deceased is "generous". I long to read "stingy git" - or do they never die?

Siobhán Ní Chuanaigh
Dublin, Ireland

● Re the preponderance of deaths after a "short illness", the great American clown Palfi used to conclude shows by proffering a collection box to the audience, suggesting they contribute to research into the most dangerous of ailments - "natural causes".

Antony Bellekom
Collingham, Nottinghamshire

● On the mystery of the vanished beef joint, the dog and the missing plate (Letters, 29 July), did Jeanette Hamilton check the dishwasher?

Paul Wright
King's Lynn, Norfolk

Mike Salisbury

Wildlife television producer who worked on the Life series with David Attenborough

Salisbury on location in Tanzania for Life on Earth in the 1970s, main image, and with David Attenborough in discussion about a humming-bird hawk moth sequence for Life in the Undergrowth, 2005

BBC; TOM CLARKE/ NATURE PICTURE LIBRARY

In a film-making career of more than four decades, Mike Salisbury, who has died aged 84 after a brief illness, was series producer of some of the BBC Natural History Unit's most groundbreaking and popular programmes. These included Kingdom of the Ice Bear (1985), The Private Life of Plants (1995), The Life of Birds (1998), The Life of Mammals (2002) and Life in the Undergrowth (2005) - the "Life" series all authored and presented by his childhood hero, Sir David Attenborough. During the 1990s, Mike was series editor of The Natural World, steering this long-running series towards hard-hitting conservation issues.

A self-effacing man, Mike listened with keen interest at the Wildscreen Panda awards in 2006 as Attenborough listed the accomplishments of the winner of the award for outstanding achievement. Only when his own name was announced did he realise that Sir David had been talking about him.

This award, followed in 2007 by his appointment as OBE, recognised Mike's reputation for innovation and creativity.

He did not follow the traditional route to becoming a wildlife film-maker. He spent his 20s volunteering overseas, and then did a range of odd jobs, while directing and acting in plays for a local amateur dramatics society. Even when he finally became a TV researcher, he initially worked in science and light entertainment before arriving at the BBC Natural History Unit in the early 1970s.

Born in Derry, Northern Ireland, Mike was the youngest of three children of Molly (nee Heywood) and Freddy Salisbury, who ran a lawnmower business. Brought up in Harpenden, Hertfordshire, Mike developed a passion for wildlife at an early age, his mother teaching him the names of birds, plants and insects that they saw while walking their dog.

After leaving St George's school with A-levels in English, zoology and botany, Mike decided not to go to university. Instead, he became a volunteer with VSO, travelling by steamship to Swaziland (now Eswatini), where he taught Nelson Mandela's children and also worked as a mechanic. Africa's exotic wildlife provided scope for stills photography. On returning home, he joined his father's business. But Mike aspired to a more exciting life.

Initially, he pestered Peter Goodchild, the editor of the BBC's science flagship, Horizon, for work experience. Time and again he was rebuffed, and told that there were no vacancies. Finally, he engineered a face-to-face meeting with Goodchild, and was offered a couple of weeks as a holiday stand-in researcher.

> **"In the days before video, the team pushed film technology to its limits with trailblazing time-lapse sequences**

When this ended, Mike was told that if he wanted to work in TV he needed to come up with programme ideas. So during breaks while driving lorries, he telephoned scientists around the world, posing as a BBC employee. His persistence finally paid off when he was rewarded with a contract.

He also worked in light entertainment, booking guests - including Muhammad Ali, John Lennon and Yoko Ono - for the initial series in 1971 of Michael Parkinson's chatshow, before successfully applying to the Bristol-based Natural History Unit, as studio director on the children's programme Animal Magic.

On his very first episode, he suffered the perils of live TV when a hornbill - which during rehearsal had been perfectly cooperative - decided to fly up into the studio lights just as the opening titles were running. His big break came as an assistant producer on what was to become Attenborough's landmark series, Life on Earth, filmed over three years and broadcast in 1979.

While filming polar bears for Kingdom of the Ice Bear, he and the cameraman Hugh Miles persuaded the Norwegian army to donate anti-personnel explosives, to scare the animals off if they ventured too close. However, one morning they awoke to discover that, during the night, a female polar bear had broken into their storage igloo and eaten all the explosives - apparently without suffering any ill-effects. The shoot was a great success, with footage of three young cubs emerging from their underground den.

One of Mike's greatest achievements was The Private Life of Plants. For this, in the days before video, the team pushed film technology to its limits with trailblazing time-lapse sequences. Yet the series went ahead at all only thanks to the Hollywood star Jane Fonda.

During a tense meeting with the broadcasting mogul Ted Turner, Fonda's then husband, it transpired that the co-production money required by the BBC was far too high for the Americans. As Mike recalled, Jane suddenly intervened: "Oh Ted, I love flowers, I think you've got to do it." Ted smiled and responded, "OK, you've got your $4m, now get on with it."

Having inspired so many of his colleagues with his enthusiasm, kindness and generosity, Mike left the BBC in 2006.

In 1969, he married Vyv Foot, who became professor of applied microbiology at the University of the West of England. She survives him, along with their children, Ben, Clare and Elly, grandchildren, Molly, Tom, Bella, Vic, Cormac and Peggy, and his siblings, Angela and Pete.

Stephen Moss

John Michael Salisbury, television producer, born 29 March 1942; died 13 May 2026

Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani

Down-to-earth emir of Qatar and founder of the Al Jazeera media network

In June 1995 the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani, was holidaying at a luxury lakefront resort in Geneva, Switzerland. His son, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, having effectively run the daily affairs of the country for more than a decade during Khalifa's prolonged absences abroad, resolved to depose him. In a swift and bloodless operation, the 43-year-old crown prince proclaimed himself the new emir, a move that would permanently alter the trajectory of his nation and reshape the modern Middle East.

Following his audacious takeover, Hamad, who has died aged 74, became a completely different kind of leader from his regional contemporaries. Eschewing the ritualistic, baroque finery and aloofness traditional to Gulf monarchs, he governed Qatar more like the managing director of a global corporation.

He was famously down-to-earth, frequently driving his own vehicle around the streets of Doha and dining in local restaurants with minimal security. A "big picture" thinker, he focused on long-term strategy while delegating the minutiae of daily governance to trusted technocrats. This singular determination was widely recognised by foreign observers; a leaked July 2008 US embassy cable published by WikiLeaks quoted a source who said that: "The Amir seems to be the only one in the Government who has a vision for this country. The details of that vision, however, are not entirely clear to anyone, except perhaps the Amir himself and his closest associates."

His achievements as emir were monumental. Hamad successfully bypassed the "oil curse" that plagued his neighbours by aggressively developing Qatar's massive offshore natural gas reserves, transforming the state into an economic juggernaut with one of the highest per capita incomes in the world. His domestic legacy included delivering Qatar's first implemented written constitution, introducing democratic municipal elections, and elevating the status of women in public life.

Crucially, he established Qatar as a global media hub in 1996 by founding Al Jazeera, initially an Arabic news satellite TV station, later expanding its reach in English and Spanish. In 1998 he abolished the ministry of information, thereby ending official state censorship.

His death marks the conclusion of a transformative era for the small Gulf peninsula, which he single-handedly dragged from regional obscurity into the centre of global geopolitics. While maintaining defence and security links with the US, he maintained a deep-seated commitment to the Palestinian cause, an outlook inherited from his father. He gave the leaders of Hamas a base in Doha, an engagement aimed at pulling the militant group away from the Iranian and Syrian "axis of resistance" and getting them to face reality and negotiate.

During the Arab spring of 2011, Sheikh Hamad rode the whirlwind, proactively championing his policy of "Arabs sorting out Arab problems", backing revolutionary movements in Libya and Syria, amplifying popular revolts through Al Jazeera, and positioning Qatar to shape political Islam across the region, all while selectively contributing troops to Bahrain to preserve Sunni supremacy.

Born in the capital city of Doha, Hamad was a member of the Al Thani ruling family, members of the Bani Tamim, an ancient Arabian tribe that supported the prophet Muhammad in the earliest days of Islam and carried the movement to Andalucía, in southern Spain. His mother, Sheikha Aisha bint Hamad Al Attiyah, died shortly after his birth. Growing up within this powerful tribal lineage, his early life was shaped by traditional custom alongside a rapidly modernising world.

Hamad governed Qatar like the managing director of a global corporation
DIMITAR DILKOFF/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

As a youth, Hamad experienced formative encounters that would influence his future philosophy of governance. He had his first exposure to democracy as a boy during a trip to London. The concept seemed so ridiculous to him that he had to be led from the House of Commons balcony in hysterical laughter after witnessing his first parliamentary debate.

Back home, his early formal education was dominated by émigré Egyptian teachers, under whose influence he became a virulent Nasserist. This anti-colonial fervour culminated around 1967, when he participated in political protests, throwing stones at the British embassy and denting its metal shutters.

He later realised that these radical pan-Arab movements had misled his generation, an epiphany that sparked his lifelong commitment to replacing foreign educational influences with indigenous, world-class Qatari institutions through the later creation of the Qatar Foundation, promoting education, scientific research and community development.

To prepare for his state duties, he attended the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in the UK, graduating in 1971. On his return, he held several military posts, and in 1977 was appointed minister of defence.

Over the next two decades, as his father spent increasing amounts of time on the French Riviera, Hamad assumed the day-to-day administration of the state. He became immensely popular among his peers and successfully buried centuries-old rivalries between competing branches of the Al Thani family, establishing a unified political front that paved the way for his eventual accession.

> **"In a highly unusual move for a Gulf ruler, he chose to step down voluntarily from the throne in 2013**

In his personal life, Hamad balanced tribal alliances and personal compatibility across his three spouses, by whom he had 24 children. His second wife, Sheikha Moza bint Nasser al-Misned, emerged as his primary strategic partner, collaborating deeply on national education and social reforms. Hamad carefully managed the upbringing of his large family, deliberately fostering a competitive yet disciplined environment to select the most capable successor to maintain the country's stability.

In a highly unusual move for a Gulf ruler, Hamad chose to step down voluntarily from the throne in 2013, passing the mantle to the next generation. He retired to a life of quiet diplomacy, historical research and cultural advocacy, split between Doha and his properties in Europe.

He was succeeded as emir by his son Sheikh Tamim, who continued to guide the nation along the strategic path forged by his father's singular vision. Their most spectacular deployment of soft power came with the announcement in 2010 that Qatar would be hosting the 2022 men's football World Cup.

The "father emir" is survived by his three wives, 11 sons and 13 daughters.

Hugh Miles

Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, emir of Qatar, born 1 January 1952; died 12 July 2026

Birthdays

Sir James Anderson, cricketer, 44; **Paul Anka**, composer and singer, 85; **Jennifer Barnes**, opera singer and musicologist, 66; **Prof Stephen Blackmore**, botanist, 74; **Sir Peter Bottomley**, former Conservative MP, 82; **Kate Bush**, singer and songwriter, 68; **Alun Cairns**, former Conservative MP and secretary of state for Wales, 56; **Hannah Cockroft**, Paralympic gold medalist, 34; **Kenton Cool**, mountaineer, 53; **Laurence Fishburne**, actor, 65; **Kerry Fox**, actor, 60; **Sofie Gråbøl**, actor, 58; **Wg Cmdr Andy Green**, world land speed record-holder, 64; **Lady (Harriet) Harman**, KC, former Labour MP, 76; **Lisa Kudrow**, actor, 63; **Patrick Modiano**, novelist, 81; **Stephen Moss**, journalist and author, 69; **Sir Christopher Nolan**, film director, 56; **Tom Pidcock**, cyclist, Olympic gold medalist, 27; **Jean Reno**, actor, 78; **Jason Robinson**, rugby player, 52; **Justin Rose**, golfer, 46; **Arnold Schwarzenegger**, actor and former governor of California, 79; **Hilary Swank**, actor, 52; **Daley Thompson**, athlete, 68; **Frances de la Tour**, actor, 82; **Christopher Warren-Green**, violinist and conductor, 71.

Puzzles

Yesterday's solutions

Killer sudoku

Easy

7	6	4	3	9	8	2	5	1
5	1	3	6	7	2	9	4	8
8	9	2	5	4	1	6	3	7
3	5	8	4	1	9	7	2	6
1	4	7	8	2	6	3	9	5
6	2	9	7	3	5	8	1	4
2	8	6	9	5	4	1	7	3
9	3	5	1	8	7	4	6	2
4	7	1	2	6	3	5	8	9

Medium

6	4	9	1	7	8	5	3	2
7	3	2	6	4	5	8	9	1
8	5	1	3	2	9	7	6	4
2	1	6	5	9	3	4	7	8
4	9	3	8	1	7	6	2	5
5	7	8	4	6	2	3	1	9
3	6	4	9	5	1	2	8	7
9	2	5	7	8	6	1	4	3
1	8	7	2	3	4	9	5	6

Codeword

		C		W		D	O	W	N	I	N	G
J	O	L	L	I	T	Y		E		M		R
I		E		T		E	C	L	I	P	S	E
N	O	R	T	H		D		C		A		E
X		K		O			R	O	U	S	E	D
E			F	U	S	S		M		S		Y
D	W	E	L	T		Q	U	E	U	E	D	
	A		E			U			N		U	
	S	T	A	N	Z	A		S	I	N	E	W
C		R		O		D	U	E	T			A
I	T	A	L	I	C			L		S		L
T		M		S		B		F	O	C	A	L
R	E	P	L	I	C	A		I		R		E
I		L		E		R	E	S	T	A	R	T
C	H	E	V	R	O	N		H		P		

Cryptic crossword

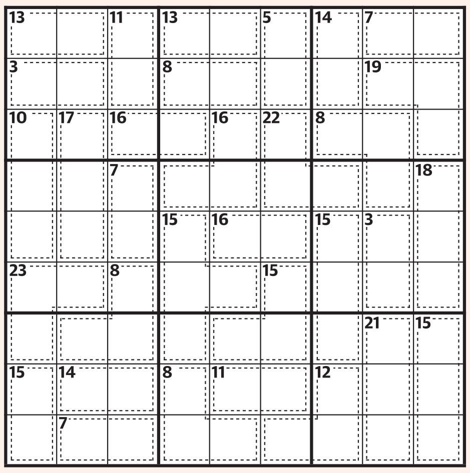
Solution No. 30,071

				L				P		A				
N	E	W	B	I	E		D	O	C	U	S	O	A	P
E		A		B				I		T		P		A
W	E	I	R	D	O		I	N	F	O	T	E	C	H
S		T		E				S		C		D		S
P	O	R	T	M	A	N	T	E	A	U				
E		E				A		T		E		W		T
A	S	S	E	G	A	I		T	U	S	S	O	R	E
K		S		A		L		I				R		L
				L	A	B	R	A	D	O	O	D	L	E
S		C		U		I				A		F		P
T	E	A	M	M	A	T	E		O	R	W	E	L	L
Y		S		P		I				I		S		A
E	L	E	P	H	A	N	T		K	N	O	T	T	Y
				S		G				G				

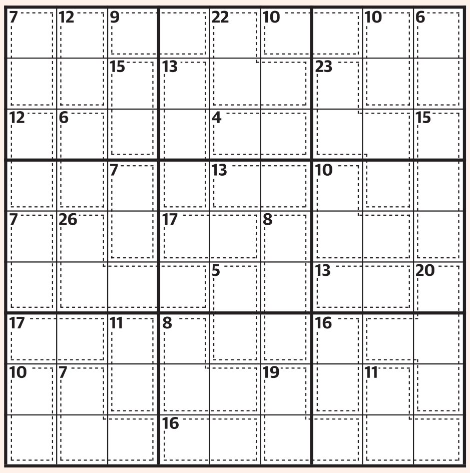
Killer sudoku

Easy

The normal rules of sudoku apply: fill each row, column and 3x3 box with all the numbers from 1 to 9. In addition, the digits in each inner shape (marked by dots) must add up to the number in the top corner of that box. No digit can be repeated within an inner shape.



Medium



Codeword

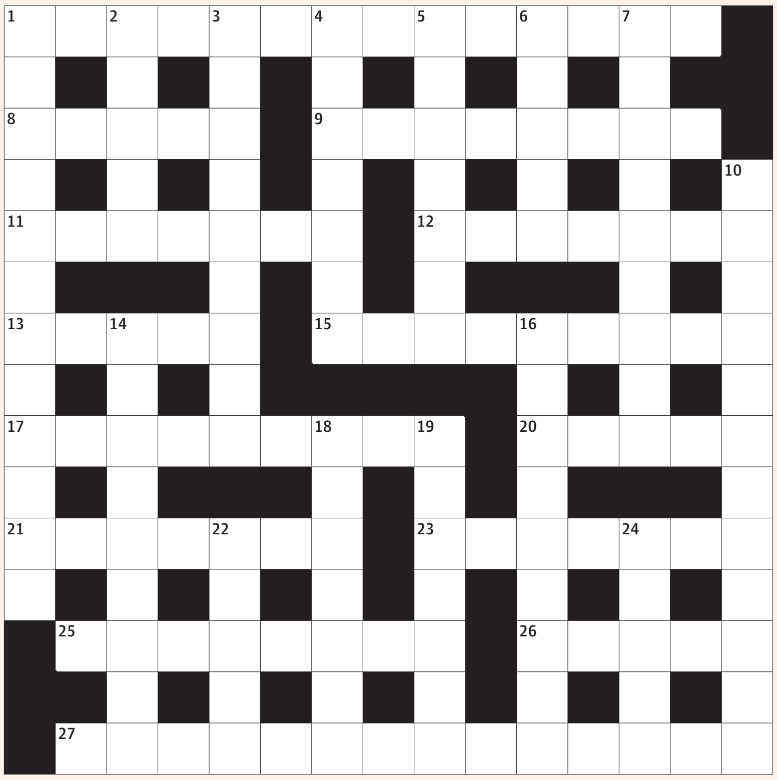
Each letter of the alphabet makes at least one appearance in the grid, and is represented by the same number wherever it appears. The letters decoded should help you to identify other letters and words in the grid.

1	6	1	21	25	4	1		17	4	22	13	7
12		8		10		8		10		11		22
10 O	16	21		22	10	22	13	8	10	1	22	11
6		6		13				25		8		21
18	12	1	7	7	21	7		21	12	1	6	15
	21		10			17	4	6		5		24
15	21	1	6	7		20		17	8	1	16	12
1		15		4	18	12	10	10		6		21
4	6	15	21	26		4		8	1	22	21	15
9		4		19	24	6			4		8	
24	6	22	12	21		18	8	1	15	24	1	12
4		17		6				4		6		1
8	1	4	6	22 C	10	1	17	7		2	21	23
4		14		21		22		12		4		21
7	12	21	15	7		21	3	21	22	17	21	15

A B ~~C~~ D E F G H I J K L M N ~~O~~ P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 O	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22 C	23	24	25	26

Guardian cryptic crossword No 30,072 set by Enigmatist



Across

1 Accompanied by star, left behind with knowledge of Glasgow sports venue (10,4)
8 Regretful of £1000 deposited after bankruptcy (5)
9 Discarded top class team (3-5)
11 Solo turn by crossword guru touring centre of 1ac? (7)
12 Maximum and minimum values taken out of context, remarkably (7)
13 Change location of union meeting in telephone call? (5)
15 Under a great burden, Ms Viner perhaps, with work (9)
17 An essential for burner of midnight oil hit spot (9)
20 Guiltless about Jack Sprat's diet, it's implied (5)
21 Arctic resident worked in retirement with supercomputer (7)
23 Cheese production initially stops its run (7)
25 Dodge section that is recording (8)
26 Forest dweller there – fearfully symmetrical, according to recital (5)
27 *Planet*'s reporter takes chorus on leave, on the way to the Proms? (10,4)

Down

1 Charles and his mum in dust-up about constant sleazy activity (4,8)
2 Water nymph transformed by Diana (5)
3 Mostly where soldiers are trained to place their trust (2,7)
4 Harsh and unscrupulous activity, seizing racy tapes (7)
5 Awfully sick after leaving new soup kitchen, getting better (2,3,2)
6 Start rolling the cameras here (5)
7 Notices surrounding hip-hop doctor's name on envelope (9)
10 Sorcerer welcomes assistance getting diplomat initial crossing? (6,6)
14 Actor suggesting a spot of 1dn? (3,6)
16 Sort of alpine act a daring climb? (2,7)
18 It's a bit gluey getting up on a cycle (7)
19 Old drunkard beats wino up (7)
22 Spurs are improving, reportedly (still in need of work) (5)
24 Friend is one shot (5)

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Life&Arts

Thursday 30 July 2026

Buzz off!

What's behind this summer's plagues of flies?

The Guardian

Adrian Chiles

The saddest words I've ever heard

page 3

Michael Thomas

Why I took 20 years to write my second book

page 4

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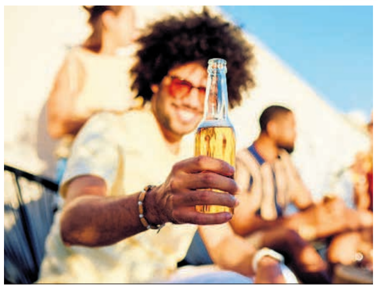
PASS NOTES
№ 5,028



Drinkflation

Age: The current round started in 2023.
Appearance: To the naked eye, no appreciable change.
But drinks are getting bigger? Drinks are staying the same size.
Then the price of these same-sized drinks is getting higher? Prices are also staying the same.
So what is happening? The drinks are getting less alcoholic.
Which drinks? Specifically, beer. Even more specifically, Carling Original, which is being reduced in strength from 4.0% alcohol by volume (ABV) to 3.4%.
I hadn't noticed. You won't have done, because the change doesn't come into effect until October.
Also because I don't drink Carling. Or indeed beer. Good for you.
Anyway, if they're actually reducing the alcohol, why is it called drink*flation*? It's a coinage based on shrinkflation: the practice of reducing food portion sizes – putting fewer crisps in the bag, say – while keeping prices the same.
Sneaky. Are any other beer brands considering doing something similar? Lots already have: Foster's has gone from 4.0% to 3.4% ABV over the last three years; Sol went from 4.2% to 3.4% in 2025. Carlsberg, Grolsch, John Smith's, Coors and Amstel have also reduced their alcohol levels.
Is this because drinkers prefer weaker beer? Or is it a bid to curb the nation's alcohol consumption on the sly? Neither. It's a bid to save money and maximise profits.
How much money can you save by reducing the level of alcohol by a few measly percentage points? A lot. But it's not the alcohol that costs money, it's the tax.
I have no idea what you're talking about. The move could have something to do with the changes to alcohol duty in 2023, under which packaged beer between 3.5% and 8.4% ABV attracts a levy of £22.58 per litre of pure alcohol.
I don't know what that amounts to. For a 4.0% beer it's about 41p a pint. Whereas a 3.4% beer is subject to a duty of just £9.96 per litre of pure alcohol, or about 19p a pint.
That's quite a difference, but what if people don't like Carling's new weak beer? The company claims the 3.4% version actually ranked "higher for overall taste" in consumer tests. It also laid the groundwork for the reduction by introducing a stronger and more expensive Black Label version in February, at 4.7%, creating a "value-premium price ladder" within the brand.
Do say: "Alcohol duty must strike a difficult balance between raising revenue and improving health."
Don't say: "3.4%? My urine is stronger than that."

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: COOKELMA/GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO. THIS PAGE: JOHNNY SAVAGE/THE GUARDIAN

Adrian Chiles

I've never cried during a live broadcast – until now

In more than 30 years of live broadcasting, I've only once sobbed on air. This was the other week, during a radio interview with a professor of psychology called Katriona O'Sullivan. That's what she is now, a professor at Maynooth University in County Kildare. Before that, she was at Trinity College Dublin, where she also got her PhD. Before that, she was to be found on the access programme through which she got into Trinity. Before that she was living a life of chaos in Dublin, a single mother with next to nothing.

She was in Dublin escaping an even more chaotic life in Birmingham, which had followed a childhood in Coventry, growing up in harrowing, grinding, distressing, miserable, terrifying poverty. No single adjective feels adequate here, so I've thrown in as many as I can think of.

She's better with words than me, as you'll find if you read her memoir, which is called Poor. I'm buying so many copies of her book to give to people that she may soon have to write one called Rich. I'm on a mission to get everyone in the country to read it.

O'Sullivan and her siblings were parented, if that's the right word (it isn't), by two heroin users. She went hungry, for food and for love. Her first real taste of either came at primary school. It was there she came across Ms Arkinson and Miss Hall. If Coventry can manage a statue of Lady Godiva atop a horse, I suggest it should also find a spot for one of Ms Arkinson and Miss Hall.

Ms Arkinson, a teacher, was Irish and knew O'Sullivan's heritage. "An Irish girl in my class – what a treat." To have an adult pleased to have her in the room was a new sensation for O'Sullivan. "I loved Ms Arkinson and I knew she loved me," she writes. "Her eyes said so. The way she helped me said so."

Miss Hall was the teacher's assistant who, like Ms Arkinson, like every kid in the school, was aware that poor Katriona smelled. "Pissy pants", some of her classmates called her. As children often do when they are in crisis, she wet the bed, every night. And she didn't know how to wash. "There were no towels in our bathroom, barely any toilet paper. Never any soap. None of us owned a toothbrush." Miss Hall took her to the toilets, locked the door and taught her how to wash. And she gave her clean pants that had the days of the week stamped on them. Words fail me.

In a fairy story, this would have been the moment that things started to get better. Well, they did, but mainly they didn't. Years of disarray lay ahead, horrific stuff I can't bear to relate here. And even stuff, she told me, that she couldn't bring herself to write. What that concerns I dread to think.

She tells an uplifting, if brutal, story so well. It helps that I love her voice, which is a mashup of my two favourite accents: my, erm, own accent, West Midlands, and Dublin. Listening to her, it struck me how much we know about the lives of all manner of ordinary and extraordinary people. Celebrities afford us blow-by-blow accounts of their every move. Athletes, actors, musicians, politicians; you name it. Some of their accounts are better than others, some more honest than others. But we have that insight. Important work is also done by film-makers, endeavouring to show what life looks like in far-flung corners of planet Earth.

This is all to the good, but it's bizarre that we know more about what it's like to be Taylor Swift, or Cristiano Ronaldo, or what it's like to live in Bangladesh or the Amazon basin, than we know about what life is like for millions of people in this country with childhoods like Katriona's.

Most of us probably have a clearer idea of what it's like to live on the International Space Station than what it's like to live in a tower block in the wrong part of Coventry, existing – just existing – as a member of the underclass. Underclass is a ghastly word, I know, which is possibly one reason we don't like using it. More likely it's just another excuse to look away and pretend that world doesn't exist. There's a good chance you haven't even read this far.

O'Sullivan's story, in a turn of events that is nothing less than thrilling, has a happy ending. She landed in Dublin before the 2008 crash, when the Celtic tiger was still alive and kicking. There was money about – money to help people in her world. Help with childcare, treatment for addiction, counselling, access courses to higher education for those whose trajectories were never going to fly them close to any such thing. It all worked out wonderfully in the end. And it's joyous to join her on that ride.

Then the epilogue, her afterword, is a thump to the solar plexus. It amounts to a stern bollocking from her to you if you happen to be drawing the wrong conclusions from this story. It's fine to love the rags-to-riches ride – who doesn't? – but if you're taking it as proof that, if you just try hard enough, you can do it, *you can be anything you want to be,* then that, she says in so many words, is balls.

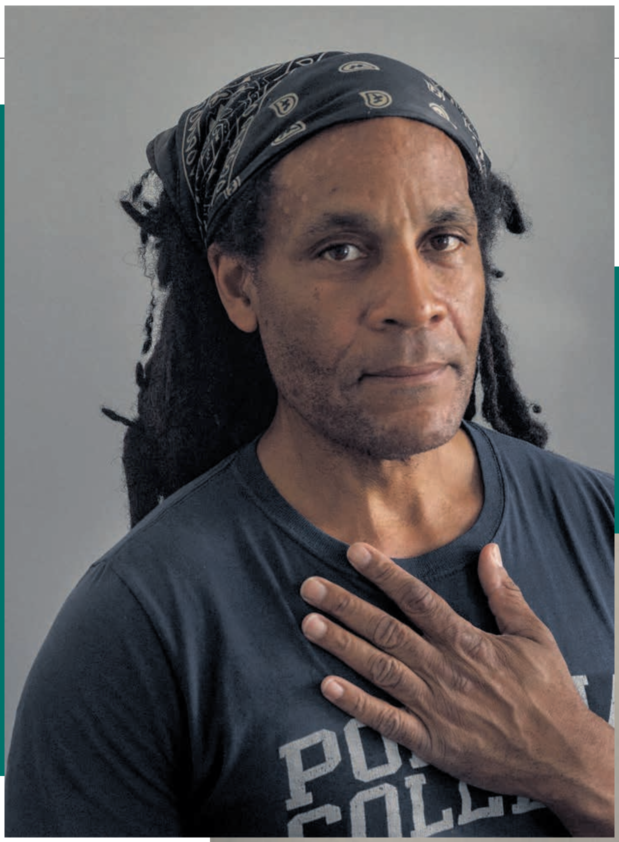
Most people who start out in the world she knew never make it out. She insists she did so only because political decisions were made in a time of relative plenty to fund the kind of social services that were there to help her. Many of those services, in Ireland and the UK, have since been cut.

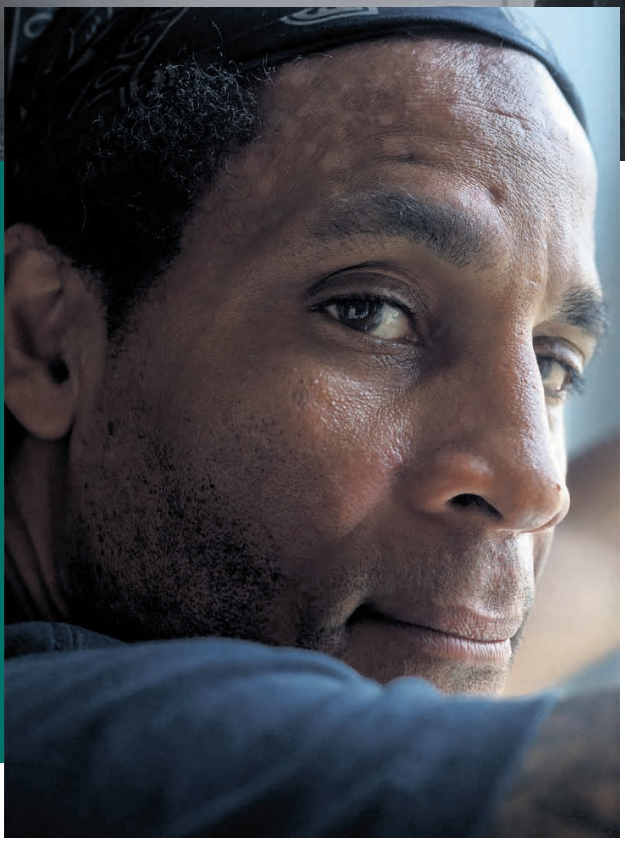
As for the bit that had me choking up on live radio, it was talking about three words that jumped out of a sentence in her book describing her love, her need, for school dinners. It's not her reference to the food that got me – it's how, almost as an aside, she refers to her classmates: "Other kids, the loved ones, they sometimes complained, but I didn't give a shit what was served. I'd have eaten anything."

The loved ones. What it must be like to think that everyone but you is loved.

▼ *'She tells an uplifting but brutal story' … Katriona O'Sullivan*

'There's been a lot of loss'





Michael Thomas's first book made him famous – then he spent 20 years failing to write the follow-up. He explains what got in the way

Steve Rose

It should be some kind of happy ending when, after years of poverty and graft, an aspiring writer publishes their debut novel and it is greeted with acclaim and awards – but that's not how it happened for Michael Thomas. His 2006 novel Man Gone Down seemed to augur the arrival of a powerful new literary voice, the beginning of a brilliant career. He featured on the cover of the New York Times Book Review, he won the €100,000 Dublin literary award – one of the most generous prizes in the book world – and he was promoted to assistant professor at Hunter College, New York, where he taught creative writing. But a follow-up would not arrive until now, 20 years later. Thomas's new memoir, The Broken King, goes some way to explaining what happened in between. It also confirms his formidable talent.

It is an extraordinary read – deeply personal and intimate, but also expansive and free-ranging, taking in everything from TS Eliot (the title comes from Eliot's poem Little Gidding) to James Baldwin, Brazilian football and the Rolling Stones. Thomas's story runs through what he describes as a "perfect storm of conditions": poverty, parental abandonment, racism, alcoholism, sexual violence, self-sabotage and mental illness. It would be tempting to classify it as some kind of misery memoir, but it is neither bleak nor generic – Thomas is simply too good a writer for that. Reviews in the US have been glowing: "Thomas has rendered beautifully an excruciating existence from which it is impossible to turn away," wrote Thomas Chatterton Williams in the New York Times.

Thomas did not "enjoy" literary success first time round. In fact, it contributed to his breakdown. Receiving the Dublin literary award did not make him think, "I am a great author," he tells me via video call. His reaction was more relief that he could pay off some of his debts. Nor did he revel in the attention: "When I started getting critical acclaim and showing up on the cover of things, I couldn't feel it. And I kept trying to tell people that I couldn't feel it, and they thought it was being smug or humble. I was really in a year-long descent."

He's sitting in his office at Hunter College. Behind him are books, artefacts, an acoustic guitar and a commanding view over Manhattan. "It's in a state of construction. I'm making a floating birch wall over here," he apologises, pointing off-camera. He speaks gently, with a musical lilt, and looks much younger than his 58 years – partly because he's as athletic as he is artistic. He enjoys exercise and physical labour, such as house-building, as much as he does teaching and writing. He sees nothing contradictory about "thinking of the poetry I want to write while doing an intense set of deadlifts".

In late 2007, less than a year after Man Gone Down was published: "I had a proposal, six pages, and it was neat and clean and tidy. I gave it to my editor; I had a meeting with the publisher. They said: 'Great, go off and do your thing.' I was glib about it, like: 'Yeah, I'll knock this out in six months to a year. I can write about mental illness' – not mine." He pauses to laugh at the irony. "My father's, and my brother's. And then I had a break, a really crippling break."

Promoting his book, travelling, doing talks; trying to write, teach, read, parent; procrastinating, not sleeping well, drinking too much coffee, he became what he now characterises as "short-cycling manic depressive". "I would have an 'illumination' for two hours, then I wouldn't have time to record it and I'd tumble into a depressive state. And I could have multiple states within a few days, and so the brilliant idea would become mundane or esoteric or fragmented, almost as though I was getting a narrative from a stranger."

Events came to a head when he was alone in Kansas City on his book tour, "seeing dragons and demons and all kinds of things". Waiting to board a flight home, he had a breakdown at the airport. "I knew I was insane," he writes. When his wife takes him to a psychiatric hospital back in New York, he tells the doctor: "It's a curious thing, the phrase 'out of your mind' … My trouble now is

'I don't want the things that happened to me to happen to my kids'

'I'm acutely aware of my strangeness, but not apologetic about it'

▲ *Today, Thomas has found stability: 'I don't have the anger I used to have. I don't have the fear'*

PHOTOGRAPHS: KACEY JEFFERS/THE GUARDIAN; PA IMAGES/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

that I'm in a way, in part, deep in it. More than I've ever been. It's not a good environment, doctor."

As with the rest of the book, Thomas catalogues these events in near photographic detail, but the narrative also pans out across his memories and anxieties, and his vast cultural hinterland. He almost apologises for The Broken King's expansiveness: "Part of it was realising how personal it was going to be, and trying to make it more intricate to really distance myself from the work."

Man Gone Down was a loosely fictionalised account of Thomas's life when he was in his 30s, desperately trying to keep his head above water, financially and psychically, and hold on to his marriage and his three young children. The Broken King expands on that narrative considerably, particularly Thomas's male relationships: with his father (who abandoned the family when Thomas was eight, struggled with depression, drank heavily, and at times lived in his car); his older brother (who steals from his family and others, and is in and out of prison); and his two oldest sons (he also has a daughter), whom he worries are destined to extend the lineage of troubled men.

There's a moment halfway through the book when the penny almost drops: an occupational therapist diagnoses his second son, Miles, with a "non-specific cognitive disorder" and suggests: "Like father, like son." That took him by "complete surprise", Thomas says, but he did not act on it until much later. Until that point he had attributed his difficulties in life to "race, class, artistic temperament, and just so many other things. Models from books and films and music, and just this kind of alienation and estrangement … but no, not neurodivergence." As a child he was diagnosed with dyslexia, ADHD and other conditions, but it wasn't until adulthood that it was defined as level 1 autism. As such, The Broken King is, among other things, a chronicle of neurodivergence. "I hope this doesn't seem insensitive: the book is autistic," Thomas says. "It's really just a study of someone with level 1 autism trying to tell a story."

Thomas's story raises questions about the relationship between neurodivergence and artistic talent, nature and nurture. How to square his diagnosis with other traumatic elements of his upbringing: the poverty, the alcoholism, the abandonment? Racism also plays a part. His great-grandfather was born enslaved, in Virginia, he tells me. He remembers his great-grandmother when he was a child. He shows me a photograph of his mother in Virginia, in 1951. She is looking at a burnt cross that was put up outside her high school. She migrated north to Boston, where she met his father, but largely raised him and his two older siblings singlehandedly. "We grew up in public housing with a single mom believing education was the great equaliser, and she busted her ass."

As a kid Thomas struggled to fit in, socially as well as racially (he also has Irish and Native American ancestry). "I could read at an early age and could do my brother's homework, but I couldn't tie my shoes." He connected with Black role models - Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael, Frederick Douglass - but he also loved the Beatles and Bob Dylan and Greek mythology. "I was called an Oreo [Black on the outside, white on the inside], or a 'honky nigger' or 'not really Black'."

At the same time, Thomas writes, "white people were dangerous because they were extreme. They tried to either aid or block my passage into their segregated world. *Benevolent* whites didn't think I was Black. Whatever native intelligence I possessed had nothing to do with my race. Blackness was something they were helping me overcome." Meanwhile, he was "subject to most of the chronic and systemic, acute and arbitrary violence the republic or the individual believed I deserved".

▲ *With his Impac Dublin literary award in 2009*

Thomas's marriage to a relatively wealthy white woman complicates matters further, in terms of fitting in with his white in-laws and raising mixed-race children. "Just as my mother didn't want her experience to be mine, I don't want the things that happened to me to happen to my kids," he says. "I'm not worried about them 'losing their Blackness', though. They get to define who they are." All of Black culture is theirs, he says, as is every other culture - as they were his, as they should be everyone's.

There is another challenging, complicating element to Thomas's story: early on in the book he discloses that he was raped when he was seven years old. He doesn't go into detail - except to say it happened when he was at a day camp in Boston. He didn't tell anyone at the time; in fact, he strove to hide the incident from his parents, even burning his clothes afterwards. "I knew my pain would kill them," he writes. He is open about how the experience warped his life. "Growing into a young man I was distant, wayward, wild, drunk. I could be cruel. I'd lie to everyone I knew." He struggled with self-harm, alcoholism, depression, physical and emotional intimacy - "I lived in a perpetual post-trauma." He told his future wife in his 20s after he was re-traumatised reading a passage about rape in a Baldwin novel. As soon as he finished reading it he went into a fever, was trapped in his apartment for days hallucinating, and was eventually hospitalised with pneumonia. He had only just recovered when a dinner party conversation about sex caused him to shut down and not speak for three days.

In this context, I hesitate to even bring the incident up. Thomas is comfortable talking about it right now, he says, but when he has told friends about it, he has often regretted it. "It didn't bring any clarity to me and it hurt them," he explains. "Like it was giving them too much to deal with. And watching people over the years or just over the weeks, wondering how to be with me and be with that information, they had to treat me differently." These things can become a lens through which to judge others' actions and behaviours, he suggests. You could say the same of race, or neurodivergence, or gender, or any number of factors.

◀ *Thomas struggled to fit in as a kid*

I was feeling apprehensive about interviewing Thomas, I tell him, given how honestly he has written about his life. He felt the same, he admits, having not been in the public eye for decades, though he has been relaxed and talkative throughout our 90-minute conversation, which digresses at times into chat about sports teams or our favourite Beatles albums. Is there a worry, though, given how his last experience of literary success contributed to his breakdown, that the same thing could happen this time around?

He seems less worried about it. A lot has happened in the intervening two decades. He got divorced in 2014, which inevitably affected his children. His mother died from Covid in 2020 (his next book will be about her life, he says). His eldest son, Alex, is now 30, and a social worker. His second son, Miles, is 27 and handling his own neurodivergence very differently from how Thomas did. "He doesn't have as much invested in controlling the conventional world. He's not angry." Thomas also has an eight-year-old son with a new partner. He has no idea how he has been as a father, he says: "Sometimes I think I intensified some of the suffering … sometimes I feel like I gave them a lot … sometimes I just think I became my father with privilege and safety nets. Without growing up privilege-adjacent, and then having literary and academic success and a tenured position, and people saving my bacon over the years, I could be living in my car right now."

In general, it feels as if he has found some stability. "I'm trying to figure it out through Bowie right now," he says, jokingly, quoting lines from Changes: "'I turned myself to face me, but I never caught a glimpse …' I'm becoming acutely aware of my strangeness, but not self-conscious about it, or apologetic or aggressive."

Is that liberating? "It calms some of the noise," he replies. "This might sound cheesy: I don't know if I'm OK with myself, but I think I'm starting to accept myself. I'm also about to turn 59, so I don't have that younger man's piss and vinegar. I think I'm a little more reflective and less impulsive. I don't have the anger I used to have. I don't have the fear I used to have - at least in this moment. I know it can come again. I feel incredibly lucid. There's been a lot of loss in the last decade, so … today I feel OK."

The Broken King by Michael Thomas is published by Summit (£16.99)

‘It makes you feel like you’ve got a really dirty house’

If just one fly buzzing around your head is annoying, imagine what it’s like to be surrounded by clouds of them, week after week. We visit one of Britain’s most insect-plagued neighbourhoods

Lucy Knight

Francesca Davies’ living room is absolutely teeming with flies. You can’t enter the contact centre worker’s home without a cluster of insects rising from the sofa or the floor to buzz around your face. Davies and her family live in West Heath, a suburb of the Cheshire town Congleton. Davies’ husband, Alex Andrew, a 29-year-old maintenance engineer, grew up in the market town and he used to think of West Heath as a desirable area, with its well-maintained houses and access to green space. When he and Davies were able to buy a new-build here in 2019 via a shared ownership scheme, they felt incredibly lucky. That is, until they moved in, and realised that every summer swarms of flies descend on their neighbourhood, an issue that is “getting worse”, Davies says.

At the moment, the 27-year-old swats flies out of her young daughters’ bedroom every night before she puts them to bed, and keeps doors and windows closed or covered with fly nets as much as possible. She and Andrew have even bought an industrial fly killer (like the ones often found in fish and chip shops) for their kitchen, as it is impossible to start cooking without attracting even more insects. The pair have become used to the sound of flies “getting zapped throughout the night”, Davies says.

▲ *A greenbottle, one of the 7,000 species of fly living in the UK*

◀ *Congleton in Cheshire, one of the worst-affected towns*

The family have considered moving out of the area because of the flies, and say some of their former neighbours already have. But Davies is reluctant to give up on the house that is her “pride and joy”, she says. “It is a wonderful place to live. West Heath is so pretty, and everyone’s so lovely.”

Not to mention, “You would have to sell it in the winter,” Andrew points out, as prospective buyers would surely be put off by flies swarming around during a viewing. Instead, Davies is attempting to put pressure on the council and the Environment Agency to investigate by setting up a petition, which now has more than 1,000 signatures, asking local authorities “to take this matter seriously and to prioritise our community’s wellbeing”.

The petition has attracted a number of comments from other local people, including one who lives a 20-minute walk away from Andrew and Davies. “I’m shooing 40-plus flies out of my kitchen regularly throughout the day,” the commenter says. “It’s a constant battle.” Andrew says he has spoken to many neighbours who are struggling with the problem: one orders takeaways every day in the summer to avoid having to cook, while another has draped their newborn baby’s cot in a mosquito net. “They’ve all had enough,” Andrew and Davies’ neighbour Bryan Stahl says, when we walk over the road to his house, which the street’s residents generally consider to be the worst affected by the infestation.

Though it’s hard to believe as we swat flies away while we chat, today is a relatively mild day for flies, Stahl tells me, because it is breezier than it has been in recent weeks. At the height of the UK’s recent heatwave, the 54-year-old and his partner stayed inside, or in garden chairs under a gazebo walled with fly nets. Davies and Andrew have a similar structure for their garden, which they set up when their daughters want to use their paddling pool. Stahl, a higher level teaching assistant in a school, has spent about £500 on the gazebo and numerous fly screens, he thinks - and is considering forking out thousands more for permanent fly shutters. “It makes you feel like you’ve got a really dirty house,” he says.

Even though you would be hard-pressed to find anyone right now as anti-fly as the residents of West Heath, it’s not as if flies are popular with many people. Whether it’s Jeff Goldblum’s gruesome transformation into a fly in David Cronenberg’s 1986 horror film The Fly, or God sending swarms of flies as one of the 10 plagues inflicted on the Egyptians to persuade the Pharaoh to set the Israelites free in the Old Testament, the messaging is clear: flies are disgusting.

But could they be due a rebrand? After all, bees can be just as buzzy and annoying, and even sting us, but that doesn’t seem to have damaged their “cute” reputation, their likeness printed on T-shirts or tablecloths. Like bees, flies are pollinators and “essential to a healthy planet,” says Andrew Whitehouse, head of operations at the invertebrate conservation charity Buglife. In fact, he adds, there are some plants that are *only* pollinated by flies - including the cacao tree. “So if you didn’t have flies, you wouldn’t have chocolate.”

And though we might find it gross that flies are so attracted to faeces or rotting matter, it is actually a good thing that they are. “Fly larvae or maggots will eat lots of dead organic material,” Whitehouse says. “In doing that, they’re recycling nutrients back into the soil, they’re getting rid

> *‘We’ve got used to the sound of flies being zapped through the night’*

◀ *Francesca Davies with a fly trap in her garden*

▶ *A fly caught in an outdoor trap*

‘If all the insects die, we are on a downward spiral very quickly’

of those things like dead bodies and dung. That prevents the spread of disease as well. So it’s incredibly important.”

In addition, “loads of other animals eat flies”, Whitehouse says. “Spiders spring to mind, but lots of vertebrates as well. So birds and bats and amphibians and reptiles and fish all feed on either adult flies or their larvae. And they’re a really important food source for lots of these animals.”

There are more than 7,000 species of fly found in the UK, including bluebottles, greenbottles, hoverflies, mosquitoes, fruit flies and crane flies (daddy longlegs). Houseflies (your classic chunky black fly; probably what comes to mind when most of us think of a fly) are generally considered the UK’s most common, although it is difficult to say for sure, because “weirdly, not enough people study flies”, says Erica McAlister, a fly expert and Natural History Museum curator.

Houseflies are important pollinators all over the world - in fact, McAlister says, a cousin of the common housefly is the dominant pollinator in the Arctic. “People are stuck on bees being the most important pollinators - and they are good, I’m not going to deny that,” she says. But while bee larvae don’t do anything except consume food until they have grown into their adult form, flies are “kicked out at birth”, and as larvae “they’re out there already helping clean up our environment”. And for anyone stuck on the idea that flies aren’t as cute as bees, she urges them to “go and look up a bee-fly”, which she says is “arguably one of the cutest species in the UK”.

Sure, a fly that has been “walking from faeces to food or decomposing food to another food” could be transporting pathogens, McAlister admits - but in “much the same way as if you handle money or if you go into a pub or if you shake hands with people”. As for flies “vomiting” on food, another complaint you often hear from fly-haters, it is not “vomiting” in the same way we think about humans throwing up, she says. “They’re not bringing up gut contents”, but releasing digestive enzymes on to food to break it down, “because they do not have biting mouth parts - they basically have a straw or a sponge with which they can suck up these ingredients”.

Instead of dwelling on flies’ negative associations, she says, “I try to get people to think of them as like, ‘It’s amazing, you’ve got these wild animals roaming around in front of your face.’” McAlister encourages people to learn about flies’ “fascinating” metamorphosis from larvae to adult fly, or the fact that they can land upside down, or that their eyes consist of thousands of facets that act like individual cameras. Every second, “they are processing thousands upon thousands of images”, she says.

It is all the more important to think positively about flies given that insects as a whole, including flies, are largely in decline. Although some migrant species are bucking the trend, the UK’s local species that rely on specific host plants or locations are “suffering badly” as the country becomes less accommodating to wildlife, McAlister says. “We need our politicians to really work at encompassing all of their decisions with an ecological framework,” she believes. And that’s in order to protect our own future, not just the future of flies: “If we die, insects won’t care,” McAlister says. “But if insects die, we are pretty much on a very downward spiral very quickly” - because of our reliance on their pollination services.

McAlister is not saying that we should all be living like Davies and Andrew. She is well aware that flies en masse can be a problem - but killing them, particularly in “a horrible and inhumane way” such as via fly tape, isn’t always the answer. Paradoxically, creating fly-friendly environments such as ponds in gardens, or even “a bucket on the veranda”, invites all kinds of wildlife, she says, including fly predators like birds and frogs, so flies actually get eaten and end up bothering humans less.

“There is an argument” for pest control when it comes to fly infestations, she says, but the most important thing to do is to “find out why that’s happened. Because the flies are an indicator that maybe something else is going on.” When fly infestations are reported, as they are every summer (currently, residents in Sileby, Leicestershire and Llanelli, Carmarthenshire are suffering along with those in West Heath), usually a link can be found “to some sort of waste event or some sort of environmental perturbation”, the curator says.

Davies and her neighbours think their fly problem is connected to a local recycling plant run by the company Tandom. In a statement sent to the Guardian, Tandom says it has “implemented a range of additional precautionary measures”, and is “working constructively with the Environment Agency, Cheshire East council and our independent pest control specialists”, but emphasised: “There is currently no evidence that flies are breeding on our site.” A spokesperson for the Environment Agency confirmed that it is in touch with Tandom, and says it has instructed the company “to take immediate steps to tackle the issue”, adding that it “will not hesitate to take appropriate enforcement action if required”.

Rather than automatically blaming flies when they bother us, we should look for potential human involvement, McAlister thinks. While we often think of house flies as dirty because they feed on faeces and are found in dirty areas, they actually “have to be the absolute opposite - they have to be exceptionally clean because they are sometimes in a bad environment”, she says. “But it’s our environment; we’re the ones who’ve made this environment. So, you know, we’re throwing stones at an indicator that something has maybe gone wrong.”

Perhaps it’s humans, then, not flies, who are the true pests.

◀ *Alex Andrew, who has swathed his daughters’ garden paddling pool in fly nets*

▶ *Bryan and Debbie Stahl behind their protective screen*

PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRISTOPHER THOMOND/THE GUARDIAN; GETTY IMAGES

▲ *'Bergman is a north star for me' … Bibi Andersson and Liv Ullmann in the original Persona*

Murder, vengeance and breakdown

In a bold new role-swapping production starring Cate Blanchett and Nina Hoss, the National Theatre is fusing Sophocles and Ingmar Bergman. So what can two stories written 23 centuries apart tell us about our moral crisis?

Mark Lawson

In around 420BC, Sophocles staged Electra, in which the title character avenges the murder of her father by her mother, Clytemnestra. In 1966, Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman premiered Persona, in which a psychiatric nurse, Alma, is caring for Elisabeth, an actor who has suffered a breakdown while playing Electra. These two dramas, written 23 centuries apart, are now sharing the stage in an alluring new National Theatre production.

In Electra/Persona, director Benedict Andrews has paired the stories before and after the interval, linked by a stunning coup de theatre at the end of the first half. "Persona is a pinnacle of modernist cinema and Bergman is a north star for me," says Andrews. "I've long been fascinated by the impossibility - in a good way - of staging Persona, because it is so much about the camera and the silence and the closeup: the face as a terrain. And I was always fascinated by why Bergman chose to have Elisabeth break down while playing Electra, so I wanted to put them together. I think it's become clear in rehearsal that the whole evening is one cycle of grief."

◀ *'They are astonishing actresses' … Blanchett, left, and Hoss*

'I got letters saying I have poured Coca-Cola into a vat of fine malt whisky'

Early on, Andrews (Australian-born, Iceland-resident and identifying as "Ice-Stralian") had the idea that Cate Blanchett and Nina Hoss would alternate the roles of Electra and Clytemnestra in Electra, and Elisabeth and Alma in Persona; whoever plays Electra in the first half reappears as Elisabeth, and Clytemnestra reappears as Alma. The original plan was for Blanchett and Hoss to toss a coin on stage at the start of the evening but Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, in which a coin lands heads 92 times in succession, made this strategy risky.

"Also," says Andrews, "I said to Cate and Nina, 'To play your best game do you need to wake up in the morning and study your Electra or Persona text?' And they said maybe. In the end, they will have a schedule and swap night by night but the audience won't know who's playing who until the first one walks in." And if I say to the box office that I've seen one combination and want to see the other, they won't tell me when? Andrews pauses. "No."

Although he is known for staging radical new versions of classics - including Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard at the Donmar Warehouse in 2024, and Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire on a rotating set at the Young Vic in 2014 - Electra/Persona is a bold project. Another writer-director, Alan Ayckbourn, once said that, while directing, he found himself cursing what the writer had given him to do. Did Andrews understand what it would be like effectively having to rehearse two plays twice each to prepare the various permutations?

"Yeah. Long rehearsal days," he sighs with a laugh. "Yesterday, unusually, we stayed in Electra all day but I still did an hour on Persona at the end. It's important to do both every day. Although they require very different energies. It's not a double-bill; it's one *hinged* work. There are perforations from Bergman in the first half and from Sophocles in the second half."

By this stage, Andrews considers himself only a director: "We have this joke about there having been a writer. We call him Dominic. He was chained to a table for two weeks to do rewrites but now we've put him on a trawler back to Iceland."

I recently saw a hit show in which the understudy was on - they did an impersonation of the absent performer, which is standard in the circumstances. But will Blanchett and Hoss have a different interaction? "Absolutely. They are two actresses who are equally astonishing but play their instruments differently. Cate and Nina are good mates and had done the film Tár, in which Nina plays Cate's wife. So I thought it would be great to do something with them. They don't look the same but there's an echo between them: they could be sisters. In rehearsal, you see them thinking, 'Oh, they did that in that bit? Do I take that or do my own interpretation?' We're searching for something in which they each play the logic of the scene, but it may come out in different ways."

When I tell him that his Donmar Warehouse Cherry Orchard was completely different the two times I saw it, he nods enthusiastically, even though some directors would greet this with a public inquiry. "Good!" he says. "I saw the [romantic rejection] scene between Lopakhin and Varya dozens of times in rehearsal and then performance - and it was different each time. And I encourage that because, in the end, you want the truth of that moment played each night. As a director, you have set up a perpetuum mobile that the actors can continue to develop."

Andrews is having an Ancient Greek period, his previous show being a version in Iceland of Aeschylus's The Oresteia, which shares characters with Electra including Clytemnestra, Orestes and Electra herself. So is there a big overlap between his back-to-back Greek tragedies? "Huge. I moved bits across between the two shows. I spent the bulk of last year doing my text for The Oresteia. Then there was a gap before rehearsals began - for it to be translated into Icelandic - in which I wrote Electra/Persona. Which I hadn't expected to be on so quickly. I hadn't expected to be living with this crazy fucking family for so long!"

Both shows are chamber pieces - five actors in Reykjavik, four in London - so apart from the role-swapping in Electra/Persona, there is also role-play, in which the back stories of off-stage characters are acted out: "It's sometimes something like a Gestalt therapy game where you play your oppressor. And 'persona' is the word for masks, for the roles we play. The king and the judge put on those robes and play those roles. How does theatre critique all these power relationships? But, in another way, how does theatre allow us to interrogate all those roles we play in our own lives, our psyche and our dream lives?"

From the meeting room at the National Theatre where we talk, it's a short walk to Christopher Nolan's film The Odyssey at the BFI Southbank or to Simon Stone's The Oresteia at The Bridge. If the descendants of the Ancient Greek writers were on royalties, they would all have private jets. "Yes! I think they're coming back at the moment because, in these times of big political and moral crisis, we need them. The reason we are digging in this Greek rubble and soil is that these plays were made in an imperial warring empire, that was first triumphant and then later broke apart. And we are watching that with American imperialism now.

"We grew up with the idea that the US - our Rome, our Athens - was a military might but also a cultural might. And it's breaking apart. So we go back to a culture that lived through wars but also gave us philosophy and theatre and gave Freud the Oedipus myth for unpacking a family. And these plays should also make us question notions of law and justice."

There is an increasingly strong Australian directorial presence in London. As well as Stone, whose Oresteia follows his Phaedra and The Lady From The Sea, Kip Williams has frequently worked in the city: recently on The Picture of Dorian Gray, Dracula, and The Maids. Does Andrews have a WhatsApp group or reunion barbecues with his fellow expats? "Not really. But Kip was my assistant director. Simon acted in a production of mine, rotating in a glass box in Whose Afraid of Virginia Woolf? We all know each other and have collaborators that we share."

Andrews, Stone and Williams all disrupt classic texts - is that an Australian thing? A sort of textual anticolonialism or republicanism? "When I did my first Three Sisters in Sydney, the [Chekhov] tradition was still lace and linen. I got letters saying you've taken Coca-Cola and poured it into a vat of fine malt whisky. Barrie Kosky was doing something similar and we possibly were a battering ram against the conservatism of Australian state theatre then. But I'd worked a lot in Germany, where radical rethinking is what the director does, so it never made sense to me to be 'faithful' to classics. What does that even mean? I don't think of it as disrupting classics. I'm trying to access the mythic power in the piece; X-ray the inner meaning."

Electra/Persona is at the National Theatre, London, from 19 August to 10 October

▶ *'We are watching American imperialism fall apart' … Andrews*

PHOTOGRAPHS: ANTONIO OLMOS/THE GUARDIAN; TOBIAS SCHWARZ/AFP/GETTY IMAGES;
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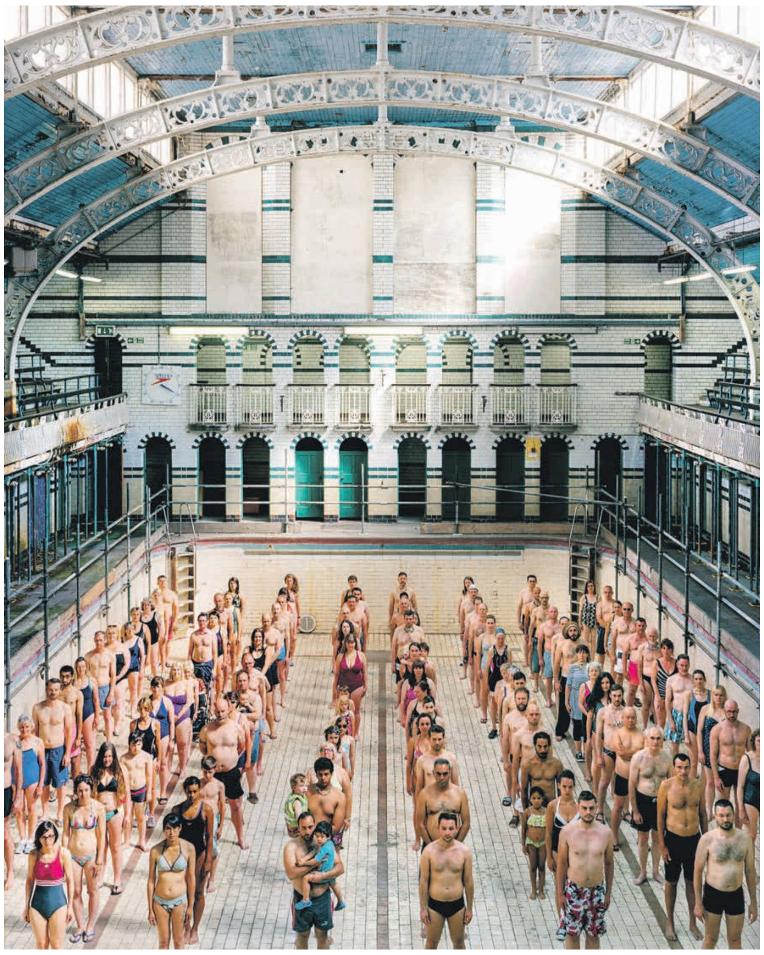
MY BEST SHOT

Attilio Fiumarella

'I was thinking about the Terracotta Army when I took this shot of 118 Birmingham swimmers in their local pool, which faced closure. They stood for an hour waiting for the sun to come out'



THE CV

Born: Naples, 1978
High point: Seeing long-term projects find their audience over time, from winning Portrait of Humanity 2020 to being commissioned by institutions whose work and values I respect
Top tip: Be persistent, and care deeply about the people you photograph. As photographers, we have a responsibility to help their stories reach a wider audience

I took this image in Birmingham on 20 July 2014 - part of my first professional photography project. I had moved to the city in 2013 and I would pass this building every day on the bus on my way to the city centre. I remember looking at the facades and being impressed and intrigued by the three different entrances - what were once the first class, second class and women's entrances.

One day I decided to get off the bus and find out what the building was. The door was open, and a nice lady welcomed me in and started to explain its history. It is the Moseley Road Baths, an Edwardian-era community building. In 2014 the second pool was still operating but the gala pool, where I took this image, was already empty. The building was in need of restoration and, without funding, the council planned to shut it down for good. The woman I met there told me lots of stories about the place - people who had come to learn to swim, how it had served as a casualty station during the second world war, and how it had even been used as a dance hall. It was a very charming place with an incredible history: as soon as I saw the gala pool, I knew I had to fill the majestic empty space.

A few months later, I managed to get a local community bursary to make a portrait project about the pool community, and the relationship between them and the building. And in July 2014, I organised this shot - the last picture of the project. The Friends of Moseley Road Baths helped recruit swimmers, and I also handed out flyers in the neighbourhood to encourage people to take part. What's fantastic about the image is that it reflects how diverse the community there is, and how many different generations swim there.

It still makes me smile that I decided to use a large format camera for the first time on a project like this. Looking back, it seems slightly crazy. It was an intense experience. We had 118 people in the pool, and everything depended on getting a single sheet of film right. There was a lot that could have gone wrong. Fortunately, many people helped make it possible. Ian Edwards from St Paul's Community Trust coordinated everyone with a megaphone, while he and a team of volunteers helped people down into the empty pool using a temporary staircase they had built.

Then I had a problem with the light. I knew that at 11am, it came in from the right to the left through the windows, giving me exactly the angle I wanted, but on the day it was overcast. After waiting for about an hour, people were starting to get nervous, but in the last five minutes, the sun finally appeared and I got the shot.

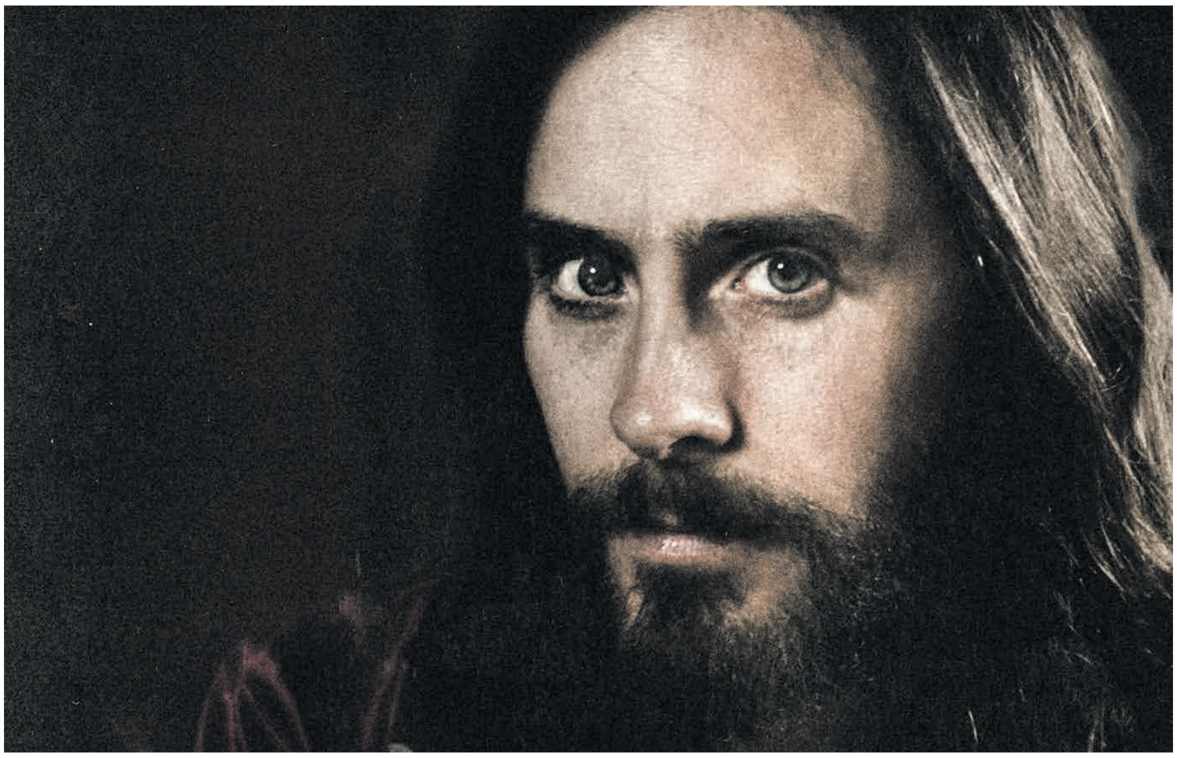
In my work, I always reference architecture - that's my background. In this image I was thinking of the Terracotta Army. What amazed me about the photograph was how it became an expression of solidarity and togetherness. In 2020 it won the Portrait of Humanity prize, and now it is getting new attention - I think because it reflects something about the time we're living in. We need to get together, to show up and to take back power. I see this photograph as an act of resistance - these swimmers had never met me but they showed up to defend a place they cared deeply about.

Recently, Moseley Road Baths secured the final funding needed to complete its restoration. The building is temporarily closed while the restoration works are completed, but it will soon reopen with renewed purpose and new public spaces. My contribution was only a very small part of that story, but I like to think it helped in some way. Looking back, I think it was a very generous thing for all those people to do. They stood together in their swimsuits, following the directions of a crazy Italian guy. To me, this photograph simply says: "We are here, together, standing up for something we believe in."

Interview by Charlotte Jansen. Attilio Fiumarella is in the Royal Photographic Society's 167th annual international exhibition at the Saatchi Gallery, London, from 7 August to 11 September

REVIEW BY STUART HERITAGE

Jared Leto: Hollywood's Dark Secret



◀ *Historical accusations … Jared Leto*

These disturbing tales of abuse must finally have consequences

★★★★★

BBC iPlayer

Jared Leto has long been a person with something of a reputational issue. The public-facing side of this was bad enough – while playing the Joker in 2016's Suicide Squad, he reportedly sent rats, dead pigs and used condoms to his cast mates – but for years there have been upsetting rumours about what he does in private. After a lengthy investigation, the BBC documentary Jared Leto: Hollywood's Dark Secret has finally brought some of them to light.

This is, as you might imagine, not a fun thing to watch. The film documents allegations of what are said to be decades of systematic criminal misconduct against teenage girls. The women interviewed here allege sexual assault, threatened sexual assault, sexualised grooming and statutory rape. They are backed up by anonymous male former co-workers who claim to have witnessed the machinery that Leto set up to procure underage girls from concerts.

What is particularly galling about Hollywood's Dark Secret is that this is not the first time someone has tried to investigate these claims. As far back as 2005, the New York Post was running gossip columns that claimed Leto was "aggressively pursuing" what were described as "underage objects of desire" at a New York hotel. By 2018, actor Dylan Sprouse and director James Gunn were trading jokes about Leto's interest in teenage girls online. Last year, Air Mail's Elena Clavarino spoke to nine women who variously claimed that Leto pursued them, engaged in sexually explicit telephone conversations with them, exposed himself to them and masturbated in front of them – all while they were underage.

When that report was published, Leto's representatives issued a denial. It seemed that everything continued as normal. He promoted his movie. He toured with his band. For a while it seemed that the world had blinked and moved on.

However, Hollywood's Dark Secret will be harder to ignore. Released on YouTube as well as the BBC to ensure maximum impact, it is a disturbing look at what is alleged to be a skin-crawling pattern of behaviour. Jessica Sartenaer and her team have put together a case with the unmistakable smell of shoe leather. Clearly, it often takes a long time for allegations like this to see the light because of a culture of silence. People are often scared to go public for fear of shame or reprisal, and it is in the financial interests of many to keep the Jared Leto machine running as long as possible.

That Sartenaer was able to find four women, and allay their concerns enough to let them show their faces onscreen, speaks volumes. We should let their testimonies speak for themselves (this is a documentary that deserves to be seen, rather than read about), but their bravery should be commended.

Although the allegations are historical – these women are now all in their 20s, 30s and 40s – it is difficult to watch them recount what they experienced while underage. Some of their stories are straight from the Hollywood predator playbook, with them being procured by Leto's team and led to dingy hotel rooms. Others are more baffling, like the woman who received sexually explicit calls from Leto as a 16-year-old, only to then receive further calls of a similar nature from a man she believes was Leto in character as somebody else.

Cumulatively, when these stories have been added to archive footage of concerts where Leto has his arms draped around young girls, and talkshow appearances where he brags about sleeping with fans, and one particularly unnerving clip where he quotes the old Dazed and Confused line about high school girls – "I keep getting older but they stay the same age" – the effect is completely disturbing.

So far, Leto has been bulletproof against allegations like these, but you can't help feeling that this film will land a blow. Of course, it should be noted that the timing of the documentary might help. Leto is no longer the box office draw he once was. Last year's Tron: Ares reportedly lost somewhere in the region of $130m, and his latest film – Masters of the Universe – is among the biggest flops of the year so far. It isn't the best reflection of Hollywood that it will only choose to round on alleged sexual predators once the bottom line has been weakened, but better late than never.

Leto declined to comment to Sartenaer and her team, unlike the robust denial he gave Air Mail's investigation. Is it a sign that the floodgates will finally open?

In the UK, Rape Crisis offers support on 0808 500 2222 in England and Wales, 0808 801 0302 in Scotland, or 0800 0246 991 in Northern Ireland

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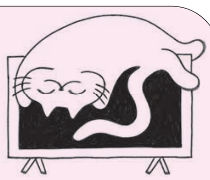
WHAT TO WATCH



Don't Date Brandon

10pm, Channel 4

Amber Rasmussen thought Brandon Johnson was "the full package" when they met on Tinder. They quickly got engaged but there was one problem: his "crazy ex" Athena Klingerman was apparently making wild demands. As this three-part true-crime series shows, it was – shocker! – Brandon causing all sorts of trouble. The women later teamed up to make a podcast exposing his lies.

Hollie Richardson

Renovation Rescue

8pm, Channel 4

Having previously been part of the Stacey Solomon Cinematic Universe, the home-fix show is now presented by Vogue Williams (who was on I'm a Celebrity, but has degrees in construction management and quantity surveying) and Luke Mabbott (who was on Love Island, but is a trained heating engineer). First, they're in Northamptonshire.

Jack Seale

Talking Pictures: Seventies Legends Part II

8pm, BBC Four

Head-spinning terror in The Exorcist! Mohawk-menacing Robert De Niro in Taxi Driver! A first space voyage with Star Wars! The 70s was an epic decade for cinema and Celia Imrie has a great time getting stuck into the moments that made it. She also remembers a particularly memorable awards speech from Jack Nicholson. **HR**

Who Do You Think You Are?

9pm, BBC One

Actor Harriet Walter didn't know much about her mother's history – but she makes extraordinary discoveries about her Italian family heritage. The second world war is her starting point. Walter's mother played a crucial secret part in the D-day landings, which compels Walter to remember her in a brand new light. **HR**

The Five-Star Weekend

9pm, Sky Atlantic

A double bill of the starry summer drama, with grieving chef Hollis (Jennifer Garner) taking the girls for dinner, followed by a local dive bar. The secrets in the group have started spilling, but is mysterious Gigi (Gemma Chan) going to reveal all about the affair? Or will Brooke (D'Arcy Carden) do it for her? **HR**

The Hunting Party

9pm, U&Alibi

A disturbing drama that will have you checking under the bed. It's been two months since serial killers escaped a secret prison – and former FBI profiler Bex (Melissa Roxburgh) is on the verge of exposing the cover-up. Meanwhile, "boogeyman" killer Ron Simms (Will & Grace's Eric McCormack) is looking for victims. **HR**

BBC One

6.0 Breakfast (T) **9.30** Animal Park (T) (R) **10.15** Trace, Track, Get My Car Back (T) (R) **10.45** Expert Witness (T) (R) **11.15** Homes Under the Hammer (T) **12.15** Bargain Hunt (T) (R) **1.0** News (T) **1.35** Regional News and Weather (T) **1.45** News (T) **2.0** Money for Nothing (T) **2.45** Escape to the Country (T) (R) **3.45** The Bidding Room (T) (R) **4.30** The Travelling Auctioneers (T) (R) **5.15** Pointless (T) (R) **6.0** News (T) **6.30** Regional News and Weather (T) **7.0** The One Show (T) **7.30** EastEnders (T)

8.0 **Fake Or Fortune?** (T) Fiona Bruce and Philip Mould investigate a painting thought to be by the French artist André Derain.

9.0 **Who Do You Think You Are?** (T) Actor Harriet Walter discovers a colourful cast of ancestors, in a journey that takes her from the debtor's court to the opera house.

10.0 News (T)

10.30 Regional News (T) Weather

10.40 **Murder 24/7** (T) (R) How five men were convicted after the murder of Aurman Singh.

11.40 **Murder 24/7** (T) (R) The fatal stabbing of Cheryl McKenna in Worcestershire in 2024.

12.35 Alan Carr's Picture Slam (T) (R) **1.20** Weather for the Week Ahead (T) **1.25** News (T)

BBC Two

6.30 Money for Nothing (T) (R) **7.15** The Bidding Room (T) (R) **8.0** Sign Zone: Gardeners' World (T) (R) **9.0** News (T) **1.0** Richard Osman's House of Games (T) (R) **1.30** The Finish Line (T) (R) **2.15** Lightning (T) (R) **2.45** The Hairy Bikers' Bakeation (T) (R) **3.45** The Farmers' Country Showdown (T) (R) **4.15** Earth from Space (T) (R) **5.15** Flog It! (T) (R) **6.0** Richard Osman's House of Games (T) (R) **6.30** Just One Thing (T) (R) **7.0** Escape to the Country (T) (R)

8.0 **Digging for Britain** (T) (R) Archaeologists explore central England's past.

9.0 **Devil in the Family: The Fall of Ruby Franke** (T) Ruby starts to banish members of the family from their home.

9.50 **The North York Moors: A Wild Year** (T) A focus on the sheep of the North York Moors during the winter.

10.0 **The Smuggling Business: Undercover** (T) An investigation into people-smuggling gangs.

10.30 Newsnight (T) Weather

11.0 Golf: Women's Open Highlights 2026 (T)

12.0 FILM **The Blackening** (2023) (T) Comedy horror. **1.35** Sign Zone: Ambulance (T) (R) **2.35** Evolution (T) (R)

ITV1

6.0 Good Morning Britain (T) **10.0** This Morning (T) **1.0** News and Weather (T) **1.20** Local News and Weather (T) **1.30** ITV Racing: Glorious Goodwood (T) **4.30** Tipping Point: Best Ever Finals (T) (R) **5.0** The Chase (T) (R) **6.0** Local News and Weather (T) **6.30** News and Weather (T) **7.30** Tom Kerridge Cooks Italy (T)

8.0 **Emmerdale** (T) Claudette does a deal, while there might be danger at the depot.

8.30 **Coronation Street** (T) Cassie revisits her greatest hits, with Ross as her new target.

9.0 **The Chase Around the World** (T) The teams land in Lisbon to take on the Dark Destroyer and the Sinnerman, who have set a series of quiz questions.

10.0 News (T) Weather

10.30 Local News (T) Weather

10.45 FILM **Bad Boys II** (2003) (T) Two undercover cops set out to stop a drug lord. Crime thriller, starring Will Smith and Martin Lawrence.

1.25 Shop on TV **3.0** The Summit (T) (R) **4.0** Unwind With ITV (T) **5.05** Deal Or No Deal: Celebrity Special (T) (R)

Channel 4

6.25 Cheers (T) (R) **7.45** Everybody Loves Raymond (T) (R) **9.10** Frasier (T) (R) **11.10** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA (T) (R) **12.05** News (T) **12.10** Find It, Fix It, Flog It (T) (R) **1.10** The Great House Giveaway (T) (R) **2.10** Countdown (T) **3.0** A Place in the Sun (T) (R) **4.0** Narrow Escapes (T) (R) **5.0** Chateau DIY (T) (R) **6.0** American Pickers (T) (R) **7.0** News (T)

8.0 **Renovation Rescue** (T) New series. Vogue Williams and Luke Mabbott offer practical DIY and design advice to homeowners.

9.0 **Murder Case: The Digital Detectives** (T) Digital forensics are needed to identify those responsible after Matthew Daulby is fatally stabbed in Ormskirk.

10.0 **Don't Date Brandon** (T) New series. Triple bill.

1.05 Crime Scene Cleaners (T) (R) **1.55** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA (T) (R) **2.40** The Undeclared War (T) (R) **4.30** Couples Come Dine With Me (T) (R) **5.20** Kirstie and Phil's Love It Or List It: Brilliant Builds (T) (R) **5.45** Countdown (T) (R)

Channel 5

6.0 Milkshake! **9.15** Jeremy Vine (T) **11.30** Storm & Alexis (T) **12.45** News (T) **12.50** Matt Allwright (T) **2.20** FILM Stolen Baby: The Murder of Heidi Broussard (Michelle Ouellet, 2023) (T) **4.0** Castle (T) (R) **4.55** Love Nature (T) (R) **5.0** News (T) **6.0** Malta: The Jewel of the Med (T) (R) **7.0** Around the World in First Class With Josie Gibson (T) (R)

8.0 **Cornwall: A Year By the Sea** (T) In St Ives, artist Iona leads a landscape painting masterclass.

9.0 **Benidorm Is Murder** (T) New series. A burnt-out ex-police officer and an actor solve crime on the coast of Spain. Drama, with John Hannah and Carolina Becquer.

10.0 **Commonwealth Games 2026** (T) Day seven highlights.

11.05 Fare Dodgers (T) (R)

12.05 Street Cops (T) (R) **1.0** Cruise TV (T) (R) **2.0** Shoplifters: Catch Me If You Can (T) (R) **2.50** Malta: The Jewel of the Med (T) (R) **3.45** Friends (T) (R) **4.35** The Highland Vet (T) (R) **5.35** Milo (T) (R) **5.45** Paddington (T) (R)

BBC Four

7.0 **Great British Railway Journeys** (T) (R) Michael Portillo explores Derby and Nottingham. **7.30 Walking With Steph McGovern** (T) (R) The broadcaster spends a day in the Yorkshire Dales.

8.0 **Talking Pictures: Seventies Legends Part II** (T) Celia Imrie revisits one of cinema's greatest decades.

9.0 FILM **Taxi Driver** (Martin Scorsese, 1976) (T) An isolated New York cab driver becomes increasingly disturbed. Drama, starring Robert De Niro, Jodie Foster and Cybill Shepherd.

10.50 FILM **Funeral in Berlin** (Guy Hamilton, 1966) (T) A spy engineers the defection of a Russian officer. Thriller, starring Michael Caine.

12.30 Talking Pictures: Seventies Legends Part II (T) (R) **1.30** Becoming Frida Kahlo (T) (R) **2.30** Great British Railway Journeys (T) (R) **3.0** Walking With Steph McGovern (T) (R)

Other channels

BBC Three

7.0pm The Catch Up **7.05** Deadly 60 **7.30** Deadly 60 **8.0** Top Gear **9.0** The Traitors Canada **10.05** The Traitors Canada **10.50** The Traitors Canada **11.35** The Traitors Canada **12.20** Canada's Drag Race: Canada Vs the World **1.35** Smoggie Queens

U&Dave

6.0am Teleshopping **7.30** Top Gear **8.20** Border Force: America's Gatekeepers **9.20** Border Force: America's Gatekeepers **10.20** Rick Stein's Long Weekends **11.20** Yukon Gold **12.20** Top Gear **1.20** Top Gear **2.20** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **3.0** Martin Clunes: Islands of America **4.0** Rick Stein's Long Weekends **5.0** Rick Stein's Spanish Christmas **6.0** The Hairy Bikers: Mums Know Best **7.0** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **7.40** Would I Lie to You? **8.20** Would I Lie to You? **9.0** QI XL **10.0** Have I Got a Bit More News for You **11.0** Taskmaster **12.0** Mock the Week **12.40** Would I Lie to You? **1.20** Would I Lie to You? **2.0** QI XL **3.0** Taskmaster **4.0** Teleshopping

E4

6.0am Modern Family **6.50** Rude(ish) Tube Shorts **7.0** Couples Come Dine With Me **8.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **9.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **10.0** America's Funniest Home Videos **11.0** Below Deck Down Under **12.0** The Simpsons **2.0** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **2.30** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **3.0** Modern Family **5.0** The Simpsons **5.30** The Simpsons **6.0** The Simpsons **6.30** The Simpsons **7.0** The Simpsons **7.30** The Simpsons **8.0** Below Deck Down Under **9.0** Cruising Paradise: Above and Below Deck **10.0** Gogglebox **11.0** Gogglebox **12.05** First Dates **1.05** Cruising Paradise: Above and Below Deck **2.05** Below Deck Down Under **2.55** Abbott Elementary **3.20** The Goldbergs **3.45** The Goldbergs **4.10** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **4.30** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **4.55** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA

Film4

11.0am FILM Drums Along the Mohawk (1939) **1.10** FILM Siege at Red River (1954) **2.55** FILM Jingle All the Way (1996) **4.40** FILM Robot Dreams (2023) **6.45** FILM Fisherman's Friends (2019) **9.0** FILM Beast (2022) **10.50** FILM The Last Duel (2021) **1.50** FILM Happening (2021)

PBS America

6.0am Teleshopping **8.0** America the Bountiful **8.35** Everest: The South West Face **9.45** Pirates: Behind the Legends **10.40** Maps of Power **11.50** A Final Landing on Iwo Jima **1.0** America the Bountiful **1.50** Everest: The South West Face **3.0** Pirates: Behind the Legends **4.0** Maps of Power **5.15** A Final Landing on Iwo Jima **6.25** Everest: The South West Face **7.40** Pirates: Behind the Legends **8.40** Maps of Power **9.50** A Final Landing on Iwo Jima **11.0** Pirates: Behind the Legends **12.0** Maps of Power **1.15** America the Bountiful **2.0** Teleshopping

Sky One

6.0am Mornings With Ridge and Frost **8.0** Stargate SG-1 **9.0** NCIS: Los Angeles **10.0** Will & Grace **10.30** Will & Grace **11.0** The Simpsons **11.30** The Simpsons **12.0** Big Cat Country **1.0** Hawaii Five-0 **2.0** Hawaii Five-0 **3.0** S.W.A.T **4.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** The Simpsons **5.30** The Simpsons **6.0** Animal Control **6.30** Animal Control **7.0** The Simpsons **7.30** The Simpsons **8.0** Rob & Romesh vs UFC **9.0** The Dyers' Caravan Park **10.0** Katie Price: Nothing to Hide **11.10** Never Mind the Buzzcocks **12.10** Animal Control **12.40** Animal Control **1.10** Grimm **2.0** Grimsburg **2.30** Grimsburg **3.0** Hawaii Five-0 **4.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** S.W.A.T

Sky Arts

6.0am Cirque Du Soleil: Volta **8.10** The Joy of Painting **8.40** The Joy of Painting **9.10** Tales of the Unexpected **9.35** Tales of the Unexpected **10.0** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **10.30** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **11.0** Discovering: Shirley MacLaine **12.0** The Movies **1.0** Tales of the Unexpected **1.30** Tales of the Unexpected **2.0** The Alfred Hitchcock Hour **3.0** The Seventies **4.0** Discovering: Charles Bronson **5.0** Portrait Artist of the Year 2021 **6.0** Tales of the Unexpected **6.30** Tales of the Unexpected **7.0** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **7.30** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **8.0** Discovering: Gary Oldman **9.0** The Life and Deaths of Christopher Lee **11.10** Hammer: Heroes, Legends and Monsters **1.05** National Theatre Live: Dr Strangelove **3.0** Van Gogh By Vincent **4.0** The Art of the Garden **5.0** The Movies

Sky Atlantic

6.0am Richard E Grant's Hotel Secrets **8.0** Billions **9.05** Billions **10.05** The White Lotus **11.25** Task **12.35** Homicide: Life on the Street **1.30** Homicide: Life on the Street **2.25** Billions **3.30** Billions **4.30** Task **5.40** Task **6.45** The Gilded Age **7.55** True Detective: Night Country **9.0** The Five-Star Weekend **9.55** The Five-Star Weekend **10.40** All Her Fault **11.45** Task **1.0** Task **2.05** Task **3.10** Billions **4.10** Urban Secrets **5.05** Urban Secrets

▲ *The Blackening, BBC Two*

Radio

Radio 3

6.30am Breakfast **9.30** Essential Classics **1.0** Classical Live. From the Proms, another chance to hear Symanowski's Stabat Mater, featuring Ryan Bancroft conducting the BBC NOW and Chorus, London Philharmonic Choir, soprano Mari Eriksmoen, mezzo Paula Murrihy, tenor James Way and baritone Szymon Mechliński. **4.0** Composer of the Week: Alice Mary Smith (4/5) **5.0** In Tune **7.0** BBC Proms 2026. Delyana Lazarova conducts the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and violinist Alena Baeva in Dobrinka Tabakova's Orpheus' Comet, Korngold's Violin Concerto in D and Prokofiev's Symphony No 5 in B flat. **10.0** Night Tracks **11.30** 'Round Midnight **12.30** Through the Night

Radio 4

6.0am Today **9.0** Natalie Haynes Stands Up for the Classics. The classicist is joined by Islam Issa and Adam Rutherford to reveal the scientific inventions made in Alexandria. (1/7) **9.30** Art That Conquered the World. James Fox examines Vermeer's Girl With a Pearl Earring. (4/4) **10.0** Woman's Hour **11.0** The Three Ages of Child (R) **11.45** Book of the Week: Confessions of a Performative Male. By Darren McGarvey. (4/5) **12.0** News **12.04** Scam Secrets. Consumer advice, with Shari Vahl. (1/8) **12.32** Sliced Bread. Greg Foot investigates air conditioning. (5/8) **12.57** Weather **1.0** The World at One **1.45** Dead Rabbit. Dan and Lucy meet the man accused of leaving dead animals outside the shop. (9/10) **2.0** The Archers (R) **2.15** Yeartides. Drama, by Ben Lewis. Claire and David are visiting his family farm to celebrate his mum's 75th birthday, but the impact of seeds sown decades before is about to be felt. (1/2) **3.0** This Natural Life. Nature writer Patrick Barkham takes Martha Kearney on a butterfly-spotting trip in Foxley Wood, Norfolk. (4/6) **3.27** Radio 4 Appeal: The Ellen MacArthur Cancer Trust (R) **3.30** Feedback **4.0** The Briefing Room **4.30** Inside Science **5.0** PM **5.57** Weather **6.0** News **6.30** Icklewick FM (R) **7.0** The Archers **7.15** Front Row **8.0** At Your Own Peril (R) **8.15** The Media Show (R) **9.0** Loose Ends (R) **9.45** The Cows Are Mad (R) **9.59** Weather **10.0** The World Tonight **10.45** Wild Dark Shore. By Charlotte McConaghy. (9/10) **11.0** Radical **11.30** A Good Read (R) **12.0** News and Weather **12.30** Book of the Week (R) **12.48** Shipping Forecast **1.0** As World Service **5.0** News **5.04** The Briefing Room (R) **5.32** Weather **5.34** Shipping Forecast **5.43** Prayer for the Day **5.45** Farming Today

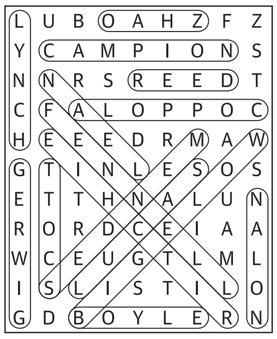
Radio 4 Extra

6.0am Raffles (4/6) **6.30** Charles Paris: A Deadly Habit (3/4) **7.0** Capital Gains (2/4) **7.30** The Burkiss Way (1/15) **8.0** Believe It! (3/4) **8.30** Sounds Like London: 100 Years of Black Music in the Capital (4/5) **8.45** Small Island (4/15) **9.0** POV (6/6) **9.30** The Time of My Life (4/5) **9.45** Daily Service **10.0** Great Lives **10.30** The British Reggae Revolution **11.0** Raffles (4/6) **11.30** Charles Paris: A Deadly Habit (3/4) **12.0** Capital Gains (2/4) **12.30** The Burkiss Way (1/15) **1.0** Believe It! (3/4) **1.30** Sounds Like London (4/5) **1.45** Small Island (4/15) **2.0** We've Been Here Before (3/4) **2.30** The Change (4/6) **3.0** The No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency (3/4) **3.45** The Phoenix and the Carpet (4/5) **4.0** Great Lives **4.30** The British Reggae Revolution **5.0** Raffles (4/6) **5.30** Charles Paris: A Deadly Habit (3/4) **6.0** Capital Gains (2/4) **6.30** The Burkiss Way (1/15) **7.0** Believe It! (3/4) **7.30** Sounds Like London (4/5) **7.45** Small Island (4/15) **8.0** We've Been Here Before (3/4) **8.30** The Change (4/6) **9.0** The No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency (3/4) **9.45** The Phoenix and the Carpet (4/5) **10.0** POV (6/6) **10.30** 1966 and All That (3/4) **10.55** The Comedy Club Interview **11.0** The Casebook of Max and Ivan (2/4) **11.30** Small Scenes (4/4) **12.0** Great Lives **12.30** The British Reggae Revolution **1.0** Raffles (4/6) **1.30** Charles Paris: A Deadly Habit (3/4) **2.0** Capital Gains (2/4) **2.30** The Burkiss Way (1/15) **3.0** Believe It! (3/4) **3.30** Sounds Like London (4/5) **3.45** Small Island (4/15) **4.0** We've Been Here Before (3/4) **4.30** The Change (4/6) **5.0** The No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency (3/4) **5.45** The Phoenix and the Carpet (4/5)

Puzzles

Yesterday's solutions

Wordsearch



L	U	B	O	A	H	Z	F	Z
Y	C	A	M	P	I	O	N	S
N	N	R	S	R	E	E	D	T
C	F	A	L	O	P	P	O	C
H	E	E	E	D	R	M	A	W
G	T	I	N	L	E	S	O	S
E	T	T	H	N	A	L	U	N
R	O	R	D	C	E	I	A	A
W	C	E	U	G	T	L	M	L
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G	D	B	O	Y	L	E	R	N

Solution no 17,544

E	A	S	Y	L	I	S	T	E	N	I	N	G
A	■	I	■	A	■	E	■	N	■	R	■	R
T	U	G	■	V	I	C	E	V	E	R	S	A
U	■	N	■	E	■	O	■	Y	■	E	■	N
P	L	A	N	N	I	N	G	■	O	P	E	D
■	■	T	■	D	■	D	■	P	■	R	■	E
S	A	U	C	E	R	■	B	R	E	E	Z	E
E	■	R	■	R	■	B	■	I	■	S	■	■
D	U	E	T	■	H	Y	P	N	O	S	I	S
A	■	T	■	S	■	L	■	C	■	I	■	I
T	O	U	C	H	L	I	N	E	■	B	U	N
E	■	N	■	O	■	N	■	S	■	L	■	U
S	L	E	E	P	L	E	S	S	N	E	S	S

Sudoku no 7,398

9	3	2	6	8	4	7	5	1
4	7	8	5	1	3	9	2	6
5	6	1	9	7	2	4	3	8
3	8	9	1	4	5	6	7	2
7	2	6	8	3	9	1	4	5
1	4	5	7	2	6	3	8	9
2	5	3	4	6	1	8	9	7
8	1	4	2	9	7	5	6	3
6	9	7	3	5	8	2	1	4

Word wheel

OUTRIGGER

Suguru

2	5	2	4	2	3
1	3	1	3	1	5
4	2	4	2	4	2
3	1	3	1	3	1
2	4	2	5	2	4
1	3	1	4	1	3

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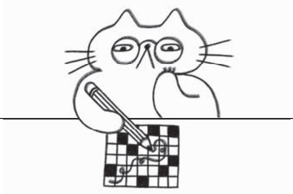
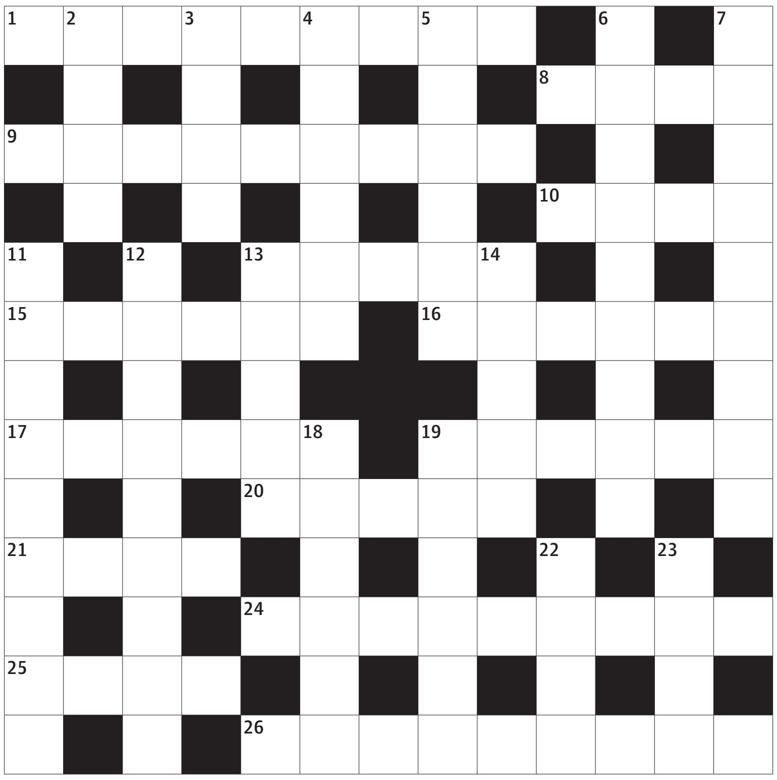


Quick crossword no 17,545

Across
1 Quickly recite (something) (6,3)
8 Money (slang) (4)
9 Perspective (9)
10 Tent, tower or jar? (4)
13 Watery liquid, esp when separated from coagulating blood (5)
15 Sharp and perceptive (6)
16 Standard (6)
17 Natural (6)
19 Be successful (3,3)
20 Government, anaesthetic or radio? (5)
21 Carry (eg a gun) (4)
24 One's foolish - or amusing (anag) (9)
25 Place to retreat to (4)
26 The bottom of something (9)

Down
2 Extremely dry (4)
3 Alternative to the country (4)
4 Secretly married (6)
5 Charity race (3,3)
6 Harmonious start (9)
7 How long food can be stored for (5,4)
11 One should help (9)
12 Testing period (9)
13 Twisting shape (5)
14 What a story teaches us (5)
18 Head (slang) (6)
19 Early release from prison (6)
22 1975 film directed by Steven Spielberg (4)
23 It's used to make cheese (4)



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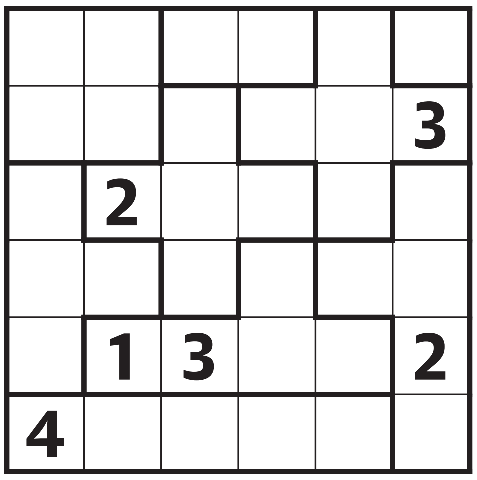
Sudoku no 7,399

Hard. Fill the grid so that each row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9. Printable version at theguardian.com/sudoku

	1			8				
			1		3	8	2	
9		3					1	
	7				2		4	
	5	9	7					3
		6		9			7	
2			9	3		7		
	9			2	7			1
		1				6		

Suguru

Fill the grid so that each square in an outlined block contains a digit. A block of two squares contains the digits 1 and 2, a block of three squares contains the digits 1, 2 and 3, and so on. No same digit appears in neighbouring squares, not even diagonally.



					3
	2				
	1	3			2
4					

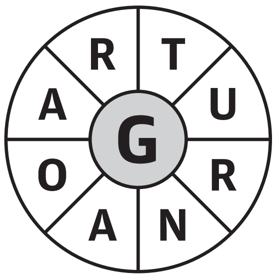
Wordsearch

Can you find 15 football terms in the grid? Words can run forwards, backwards, vertically or diagonally, but always in a straight, unbroken line.

Y	A	W	L	A	O	G	X	N
E	T	S	H	N	W	S	I	H
R	T	N	R	I	B	A	B	C
U	A	S	R	E	S	E	Y	A
T	C	I	S	T	N	T	A	O
X	K	T	O	C	E	R	L	C
I	L	O	H	G	N	S	O	E
F	B	O	O	K	I	N	G	C
E	E	E	R	E	F	E	R	L
R	A	I	N	S	E	L	T	U
L	U	O	F	I	F	A	A	B

Word wheel

Find as many words as possible using the letters in the wheel. Each must use the central letter and at least three others. Letters may be used only once. You may not use plurals, foreign words or proper nouns. There is at least one nine-letter word to be found. Target: 19. Good: 24. Very good: 29. Excellent: 34



Trivia corner

For which of these films did Kate Winslet not receive an Oscar nomination?
a. Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind
b. Little Children
c. Steve Jobs
d. Revolutionary Road
Answer top right

TODAY'S TRIVIA CORNER ANSWER **REVOLUTIONARY ROAD**